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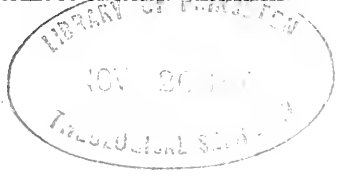
THE PSALMS

BY
ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D.D.

VOLUME II.

PSALMS XXXIX.—LXXXIX.



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CONTENTS

		PAGE
PSALM	XXXIX.	1
”	XL.	14
”	XLI.	30
”	XLII., XLIII.	41
”	XLIV.	54
”	XLV.	63
”	XLVI.	79
”	XLVII.	86
”	XLVIII.	92
”	XLIX.	100
”	L.	115
”	LI.	125
”	LII.	142
”	LIII.	148
”	LIV.	151

PAGE

PSALM LV. 158

" LVI. 171

" LVII. 180

" LVIII. 189

" LIX. 198

" LX. 209

" LXI. 216

" LXII. 223

" LXIII. 232

" LXIV. 241

" LXV. 246

" LXVI. 255

" LXVII. 264

" LXVIII. 269

" LXIX. 293

" LXX. 306

" LXXI. 308

" LXXII. 315

" LXXIII. 333

" LXXIV. 348

PAGE

PSALM LXXV. 359

" LXXVI. 366

" LXXVII. 371

" LXXVIII. 382

" LXXIX. 396

" LXXX. 404

" LXXXI. 414

" LXXXII. 425

" LXXXIII. 431

" LXXXIV. 440

" LXXXV. 451

" LXXXVI. 461

" LXXXVII. 470

" LXXXVIII. 477

" LXXXIX. 487

PSALM XXXIX.

1 I said, I will guard my ways, that I sin not with my tongue;
I will put a muzzle on my mouth
So long as the wicked is before me.
2 I made myself dumb in still submission,
I kept silence joylessly,
And my sorrow was stirred.
3 My heart was hot within me;
While I mused the fire blazed up;
I spake with my tongue.

4 Make me, Jehovah, to know my end,
And the measure of my days, what it is;
Let me know how fleeting I am.
5 Behold, as handbreadths hast Thou made my days,
And my lifetime is as nothing before Thee;
Surely nothing but a breath is every man, stand he ever so firm.
Selah.
6 Surely every man goes about like a shadow;
Surely for a breath do they make [such a stir];
He heaps up [goods] and knows not who will gather them.

7 And now what wait I for, Lord?
My hope—to Thee it goes.
8 From all my transgressions deliver me;
Make me not a reproach of the fool.
9 I make myself dumb, I open not my mouth,
For Thou hast done [it].

10 Remove Thy stroke from me;
I am wasted by the assault of Thy hand.
11 When with rebukes for iniquity Thou correctest a man,
Like a moth Thou frayest away his graciousness;
Surely every man is [but] a breath. Selah.

12 Hear my prayer, Jehovah, and give ear to my cry;
At my weeping be not silent:
For I am a guest with Thee,
And a sojourner like all my fathers.
13 Look away from me, that I may brighten up,
Before I go hence and be no more.

PROTRACTED suffering, recognised as chastisement for sin, had wasted the psalmist's strength. It had been borne for a while in silence, but the rush of emotion had burst the floodgates. The psalm does not repeat the words which forced themselves from the hot heart, but preserves for us the calmer flow which followed. It falls into four parts, the first three of which contain three verses each, and the fourth is expanded into four, divided into two couples.

In the first part (vv. 1-3) the frustrated resolve of silence is recorded. Its motive was fear of sinning in speech "while the wicked is before me." That phrase is often explained as meaning that the sight of the prosperity of the godless in contrast with his own sorrows tempted the singer to break out into arraigning God's providence, and that he schooled himself to look at their insolent ease unmurmuringly. But the psalm has no other references to other men's flourishing condition; and it is more in accordance with its tone to suppose that his own pains, and not their pleasures, prompted to the withheld words. The presence of "the wicked" imposed on his devout heart silence as a duty. We do not complain of a friend's conduct in the hearing of his enemies. God's servants have to watch their speech about Him when godless ears are listening, lest hasty words should give occasion for malicious glee or blasphemy. So, for God's honour, the psalmist put restraint on himself. The word rendered "bridle" in ver. 2 by the A.V. and R.V. is

better taken as muzzle, for a muzzle closes the lips, and a bridle does not. The resolution thus energetically expressed was vigorously carried out: "I made myself dumb in still submission; I kept silence." And what came of it? "My sorrow was stirred." Grief suppressed is increased, as all the world knows. The closing words of ver. 2 *b* (lit. *apart from good*) are obscure, and very variously understood, some regarding them as an elliptical form of "from good and bad," and expressing completeness of silence; others taking "the good" to mean "the law, or the praise of God, or good-fortune, or such words as would serve to protect the singer from slanders." "But the preposition here employed, when it follows a verb meaning silence, does not introduce that concerning which silence is kept, but a negative result of silence" (Hupfeld). The meaning, then, is best given by some such paraphrase as "joylessly" or "and I had no comfort" (R.V.). The hidden sorrow gnawed beneath the cloak like a fire in a hollow tree; it burned fiercely unseen, and ate its way at last into sight. Locked lips make hearts hotter. Repression of utterance only feeds the fire, and sooner or later the "muzzle" is torn off, and pent-up feeling breaks into speech, often the wilder for the violence done to nature by the attempt to deny it its way. The psalmist's motive was right, and in a measure his silence was so; but his resolve did not at first go deep enough. It is the heart, not the mouth, that has to be silenced. To build a dam across a torrent without diminishing the sources that supply its waters only increases weight and pressure, and ensures a muddy flood when it bursts.

Does the psalm proceed to recount what its author said when he broke silence? It may appear so at

first sight. On the other hand, the calm prayer which follows, beginning with ver. 4, is not of the character of the wild and whirling words which were suppressed for fear of sinning, nor does the fierce fire of which the psalm has been speaking flame in it. It seems, therefore, more probable that those first utterances, in which the overcharged heart relieved itself, and which were tinged with complaint and impatience, are not preserved, and did not deserve to be, and that the pathetic, meditative petitions of the rest of the psalm succeeded them, as after the first rush of the restrained torrent comes a stiller flow. Such a prayer might well have been offered "while the wicked is before me," and might have been laid to heart by them. Its thoughts are as a cool hand laid on the singer's hot heart. They damp the fire burning in him. There is no surer remedy for inordinate sensibility to outward sorrows than fixed convictions of life's brevity and illusoriness; and these are the two thoughts which the prayer casts into sweet, sad music.

It deals with commonplaces of thought, which poets and moralists have been singing and preaching since the world began, in different tones and with discordant applications, sometimes with fierce revolt against the inevitable, sometimes with paralysing consciousness of it, sometimes using these truths as arguments for base pleasures and aims, sometimes toying with them as occasions for cheap sentiment and artificial pathos, sometimes urging them as motives for strenuous toil. But of all the voices which have ever sung or prophesied of life's short span and shadowy activities, none is nobler, saner, healthier, and calmer than this psalmist's. The stately words in which he proclaimed the transiency of all earthly things are not transient. They are

"nothing but a breath," but they have outlasted much that seemed solid, and their music will sound as long as man is on his march through time. Our "days" have a "measure"; they are a limited period, and the Measurer is God. But this fleeting creature man has an obstinate fancy of his permanence, which is not all bad indeed—since without it there would be little continuity of purpose or concentration of effort—but may easily run to extremes and hide the fact that there is an end. Therefore the prayer for Divine illumination is needed, that we may not be ignorant of that which we know well enough, if we would bethink ourselves. The solemn convictions of ver. 5 are won by the petitions of ver. 4. He who asks God to make him know his end has already gone far towards knowing it. If he seeks to estimate the "measure" of his days, he will soon come to the clear conviction that it is only the narrow space that may be covered by one or two breadths of a hand. So do noisy years shrink when heaven's chronology is applied to them. A lifetime looks long, but set against God's eternal years, it shrivels to an all but imperceptible point, having position, but not magnitude.

The thought of brevity naturally draws after it that of illusoriness. Just because life is so frail does it assume the appearance of being futile. Both ideas are blended in the metaphors of "a breath" and "a shadow." There is a solemn earnestness in the threefold "surely," confirming each clause of the seer's insight into earth's hollowness. How emphatically he puts it in the almost pleonastic language, "Surely nothing but a breath is every man, stand he ever so firm." The truth proclaimed is undeniably certain. It covers the whole ground of earthly life, and it

includes the most prosperous and firmly established. "A breath" is the very emblem of transiency and of unsubstantiality. Every solid body can be melted and made gaseous vapour, if heat enough is applied. They who habitually bring human life "before Thee" dissolve into vapour the solid-seeming illusions which cheat others, and save their own lives from being but a breath by clearly recognising that they are.

The Selah at the end of ver. 4 does not here seem to mark a logical pause in thought nor to coincide with the strophe division, but emphasises by some long-drawn, sad notes the teaching of the words. The thought runs on unbroken, and ver. 6 is closely linked to ver. 5 by the repeated "surely" and "breath" as well as in subject. The figure changes from breath to "shadow," literally "image," meaning not a sculptured likeness, but an *eidolon*, or unsubstantial apparition.

> "The glories of our birth and state
> Are shadows, not substantial things";

and all the movements of men coming and going in the world are but like a dance of shadows. As they are a breath, so are their aims. All their hubbub and activity is but like the bustle of ants on their hill—immense energy and toil, and nothing coming of it all. If any doubt remained as to the correctness of this judgment of the aimlessness of man's toil, one fact would confirm the psalmist's sentence, viz., that the most successful man labours to amass, and has to leave his piles for another whom he does not know, to gather into his storehouses and to scatter by his prodigality. There may be an allusion in the words to harvesting work. The sheaves are piled up, but in whose barn are they to be housed? Surely, if the grower and

reaper is not the ultimate owner, his toil has been for a breath.

All this is no fantastic pessimism. Still less is it an account of what life must be. If any man's is nothing but toiling for a breath, and if he himself is nothing but a breath, it is his own fault. They who are joined to God have "in their embers something that doth live"; and if they labour for Him, they do *not* labour for vanity, nor do they leave their possessions when they die. The psalmist has no reference to a future life, but the immediately following strophe shows that, though he knew that his days were few, he knew, too, that, if his hope were set on God he was freed from the curse of illusoriness and grasped no shadow, but the Living Substance, who would make his life blessedly real and pour into it substantial good.

The effect of such convictions of life's brevity and emptiness should be to throw the heart back on God. In the third part of the psalm (vv. 7–9) a higher strain sounds. The singer turns from his dreary thoughts, which might so easily become bitter ones, to lay hold on God. What should earth's vanity teach but God's sufficiency? It does not need the light of a future life to be flashed upon this mean, swiftly vanishing present in order to see it "apparelled in celestial light." Without that transforming conception, it is still possible to make it great and real by bringing it into conscious connection with God; and if hope and effort are set on Him amid all the smallnesses and perishablenesses of the outer world, hope will not chase a shadow, nor effort toil for very vanity. The psalmist sought to calm his hot heart by the contemplation of his end, but that is a poor remedy for perturbation and grief unless it leads to actual contact with the one enduring Substance.

It did so with him, and therefore "grief grew calm," just because "hope was" not "dead." To preach the vanity of all earthly things to heavy hearts is but pouring vinegar on nitre, unless it is accompanied with the great antidote to all sad and depreciating views of life: the thought that in it men may reach their hands beyond the time-film that enmeshes them and grasp the unchanging God. This psalm has no reference to life beyond the grave; but it finds in present communion by waiting and hope, emancipation from the curse of fleeting triviality which haunts every life separated from Him, like that which the Christian hope of immortality gives. God is the significant figure which gives value to the row of ciphers of which every life is without Him made up. Blessed are they who are driven by earth's vanity and drawn by God's fulness of love and power to fling themselves into His arms and nestle there! The strong recoil of the devout soul from a world which it has profoundly felt to be shadowy, and its great venture of faith, which is not a venture after all, were never more nobly or simply expressed than in that quiet "And now"—things being so—"what wait I for? My hope"—in contrast with the false directions which other men's takes—"to Thee it turns."

The burden is still on the psalmist's shoulders. His sufferings are not ended, though his trust has taken the poison out of them. Therefore his renewed grasp of God leads at once to prayer for deliverance from his "transgressions," in which cry may be included both sins and their chastisement. "The fool" is the name of a class, not of an individual, and, as always in Scripture, denotes moral and religious obliquity, not intellectual feebleness. The expression is substantially equivalent to "the wicked" of ver. 1, and a similar motive to that which

there induced the psalmist to be silent is here urged as a plea with God for the sufferer's deliverance. Taunts launched at a good man suffering will glance off him and appear to reach his God.

Ver. 9 pleads as a reason for God's deliverance the psalmist's silence under what he recognised as God's chastisement. The question arises whether this is the same silence as is referred to in vv. 1, 2, and many authorities take that view. But that silence was broken by a rush of words from a hot heart, and, if the account of the connection in the psalm given above is correct, by a subsequent more placid meditation and prayer. It would be irrelevant to recur to it here, especially as a plea with God. But there are two kinds of silence under His chastisements: one which may have for its motive regard to His honour, but is none the less tinged with rebellious thoughts, and brings no good to the sufferer, and another which is silence of heart and will, not of lips only, and soothes sorrow which the other only aggravated, and puts out the fire which the other fanned. Submission to God's hand discerned behind all visible causes is the blessed silence. "To lie still, let Him strike home, and bless the rod," is best. And when that is attained, the uses of chastisement are accomplished; and we may venture to ask God to burn the rod. The desire to be freed from its blow is not inconsistent with such submission. This prayer does not break the silence, though it may seem to do so, for this is the privilege of hearts that love God: that they can breathe desires to Him without His holding them unsubmissive to His supreme will.

The last part (vv. 10–13) is somewhat abnormally long, and falls into two parts separated by "Selah," which musical note does not here coincide with the

greater divisions. The two pairs of verses are both petitions for removal of sickness, either real or figurative. Their pleading persistence presents substantially the same prayer and supports it by the same considerations of man's transiency. The Pattern of perfect resignation thrice "prayed, saying the same words"; and His suffering followers may do the same, and yet neither sin by impatience, nor weary the Judge by their continual coming The psalmist sees in his pains God's "stroke," and pleads the effects already produced on him as a reason for cessation. He is already "wasted by the assault of God's hand." One more buffet, and he feels that he must die. It is bold for a sufferer to say to God, "Hold! enough!" but all depends on the tone in which it is said. It may be presumption, or it may be a child's free speech, not in the least trenching on a Father's authority. The sufferer underrates his capacity of endurance, and often thinks, "I can bear no straw more"; but yet he has to bear it. Yet the psalmist's cry rests upon a deep truth: that God cannot mean to crush; therefore he goes on to a deeper insight into the meaning of that "stroke." It is not the attack of an enemy, but the "correction" of a friend.

If men regarded sorrows and sicknesses as rebukes for iniquity, they would better understand why sinful life, separated from God, is so fleeting. The characteristic ground tone of the Old Testament echoes here, according to which "the wages of sin is death." The commonplace of man's frailty receives a still more tragic colouring when thus regarded as a consequence of his sin. The psalmist has learned it in relation to his own sufferings, and, because he sees it so clearly, he pleads that these may cease. He looks on his own

wasted form; and God's hand seems to him to have taken away all that made it or life desirable and fair, as a moth would gnaw a garment. What a daring figure to compare the mightiest with the feeblest, the Eternal with the very type of evanescence!

The second subdivision of this part (vv. 12, 13) reiterates the former with some difference of tone. There is a beautiful climax of earnestness in the psalmist's appeal to God. His prayer swells into crying, and that again melts into tears, which go straight to the great Father's heart. Weeping eyes are never turned to heaven in vain; the gates of mercy open wide when the hot drops touch them. But his fervour of desire is not this suppliant's chief argument with God. His meditation has won for him deeper insight into that transiency which at first he had only laid like ice on his heart, to cool its feverish heat. He sees now more clearly, by reason of his effort to turn away his hope from earth and fix it on God, that his brief life has an aspect in which its brevity is not only calming, but exalting, and gives him a claim on God, whose guest he is while here, and with whom he has guest-rights, whether his stay is longer or shorter. "The land is mine, for ye are strangers and sojourners with me" (Lev. xxv. 23). That which was true in a special way of Israel's tenure of the soil is true for the individual, and true for ever. All men are God's guests; and if we betake ourselves behind the curtains of His tent, we have rights of shelter and sustenance. All the bitterness of the thought of the brevity of life is sucked out of it by such a confidence. If a man dwells with God, his Host will care for the needs, and not be indifferent to the tears, of His guest. The long generations which have come and gone like

shadows are not a melancholy procession out of nothing through vanity into nothing again, nor "disquieted in vain," if they are conceived as each in turn lodging for a little while in that same ancestral home which the present generation inhabits. It has seen many sons succeeding their fathers as its tenants, but its stately strength grows not old, and its gates are open to-day as they have been in all generations.

The closing prayer in ver. 13 has a strange sound. "Look away from me" is surely a singular petition, and the effect of God's averting His face is not less singular. The psalmist thinks that it will be his regaining cheerfulness and brightness, for he uses a word which means to clear up or to brighten, as the sky becomes blue again after storm. The light of God's face makes men's faces bright. "They cried unto God, and were lightened," not because He looked away from them, but because He regarded them. But the intended paradox gives the more emphatic expression to the thought that the psalmist's pains came from God's angry look, and it is that which he asks may be turned from him. That mere negative withdrawal, however, would have no cheering power, and is not conceivable as unaccompanied by the turning to the suppliant of God's loving regard. The devout psalmist had no notion of a neutral God, nor could he ever be contented with simple cessation of the tokens of Divine displeasure. The ever-outflowing Divine activity must reach every man. It may come in one or other of the two forms of favour or of displeasure, but come it will; and each man can determine which side of that pillar of fire and cloud is turned to him. On one side is the red glare of anger, on the other the white lustre of love. If the one is turned from, the other is turned to us.

Not less remarkable is the prospect of going away into non-being which the last words of the psalm present as a piteous reason for a little gleam of brightness being vouchsafed in this span-long life. There is no vision here of life beyond the grave; but, though there is not, the singer "throws himself into the arms of God." He does not seek to solve the problem of life by bringing the future in to redress the balance of good and evil. To him the solution lies in present communion with a present God, in whose house he is a guest now, and whose face will make his life bright, however short it may be.

PSALM XL.

1 Waiting, I waited for Jehovah,
And He bent to me and heard my [loud] cry.
2 And lifted me from the pit of destruction,
From the mire of the bog,
And set my feet on a rock—
Established my steps,
3 And put in my mouth a new song,
Praise unto our God.
Many shall see and fear,
And trust in Jehovah.

4 Blessed is the man who has made Jehovah his trust,
And has not turned [away] to the proud and deserters to a lie.
5 In multitudes hast Thou wrought, Jehovah, my God;
Thy wonders and Thy purposes towards us—
There is none to be set beside Thee—
Should I declare them and speak them,
They surpass numbering.

6 Sacrifice and meal-offering Thou didst not delight in—
Ears hast Thou pierced for me—
Burnt-offering and sin-offering Thou didst not demand.
7 Then I said, Behold, I am come—
In the roll of the book it is prescribed to me—
8 To do Thy pleasure, my God, I delight,
And Thy law is within my inmost parts.

9 I proclaimed glad tidings of Thy righteousness in the great congregation;
Behold, my lips I did not restrain,
Jehovah, Thou knowest.
10 Thy righteousness did I not hide within my heart;
Thy faithfulness and Thy salvation did I speak;
I concealed not Thy loving-kindness and Thy truth from the great congregation.

11 Thou, Jehovah, wilt not restrain Thy compassions from me;
Thy loving-kindness and Thy troth will continually preserve me.

12 For evils beyond numbering have compassed me;
My iniquities have overtaken me, and I am not able to see:
They surpass the hairs of my head,
And my heart has forsaken me.
13 Be pleased, Jehovah, to deliver me;
Jehovah, hasten to my help
14 Shamed and put to the blush together be the seekers after my soul to carry it away!
Turned back and dishonoured be they who delight in my calamity!
15 Paralysed by reason of their shame
Be they who say to me, Oho! Oho!
16 Joyful and glad in Thee be all who seek Thee!
Jehovah be magnified, may they ever say who love Thy salvation!
17 But as for me, I am afflicted and needy;
The Lord purposes [good] for me:
My Help and my Deliverer art Thou;
My God, delay not.

THE closing verses of this psalm reappear with slight changes as an independent whole in Psalm lxx. The question arises whether that is a fragment or this a conglomerate. Modern opinion inclines to the latter alternative, and points in support to the obvious change of tone in the second part. But that change does not coincide with the supposed line of junction, since Psalm lxx. begins with our ver. 13, and the change begins with ver. 12. Cheyne and others are therefore obliged to suppose that ver. 12 is the work of a third poet or compiler, who effected a junction thereby. The cumbrousness of the hypothesis of fusion is plain, and its necessity is not apparent, for it is resorted to in order to explain how a psalm which keeps so lofty a level of confidence at first should drop to such keen consciousness of innumerable evils and such faint-heartedness. But surely such resurrection of apparently dead fears is not uncommon in devout,

sensitive souls. They live beneath April skies, not unbroken blue. However many the wonderful works which God has done and however full of thankfulness the singer's heart, his deliverance is not complete. The contrast in the two parts of the psalm is true to facts and to the varying aspects of feeling and of faith. Though the latter half gives greater prominence to encompassing evils, they appear but for a moment; and the prayer for deliverance which they force from the psalmist is as triumphant in faith as were the thanksgivings of the former part. In both the ground tone is that of victorious grasp of God's help, which in the one is regarded in its mighty past acts, and in the other is implored and trusted in for present and future needs. The change of tone is not such as to demand the hypothesis of fusion. The unity is further supported by verbal links between the parts: *e.g.*, the innumerable evils of ver. 12 pathetically correspond to the innumerable mercies of ver. 5, and the same word for "surpass" occurs in both verses; "be pleased" in ver. 13 echoes "Thy pleasure" (will, A.V.) in ver. 8; "cares" or *thinks* (A.V.) in ver. 17 is the verb from which the noun rendered *purposes* (thoughts, A.V.) in ver. 5 is derived.

The attribution of the psalm to David rests solely on the superscription. The contents have no discernible points of connection with known circumstances in his or any other life. Jeremiah has been thought of as the author, on the strength of giving a prosaic literal meaning to the obviously poetical phrase "the pit of destruction" (ver. 2). If it is to be taken literally, what is to be made of the "rock" in the next clause? Baethgen and others see the return from Babylon in the glowing metaphors of ver. 2, and, in accordance with their con-

ceptions of the evolution of spiritual religion, take the subordination of sacrifice to obedience as a clear token of late date. We may, however, recall 1 Sam. xv. 22, and venture to doubt whether the alleged process of spiritualising has been so clearly established, and its stages dated, as to afford a criterion of the age of a psalm.

In the first part, the current of thought starts from thankfulness for individual deliverances (vv. 1–3); widens into contemplation of the blessedness of trust and the riches of Divine mercies (vv. 4, 5); moved by these and taught what is acceptable to God, it rises to self-consecration as a living sacrifice (vv. 6–8); and, finally, pleads for experience of God's grace in all its forms on the ground of past faithful stewardship in celebrating these (vv. 9–11). The second part is one long-drawn cry for help, which admits of no such analysis, though its notes are various.

The first outpouring of the song is one long sentence, of which the clauses follow one another like sunlit ripples, and tell the whole process of the psalmist's deliverance. It began with patient waiting; it ended with a new song. The voice first raised in a cry, shrill and yet submissive enough to be heard above, is at last tuned into new forms of uttering the old praise. The two clauses of ver. 1 ("I" and "He") set over against each other, as separated by the distance between heaven and earth, the psalmist and his God. He does not begin with his troubles, but with his faith. "Waiting, he waited" for Jehovah; and wherever there is that attitude of tense and continuous but submissive expectance, God's attitude will be that of bending to meet it. The meek, upturned eye has power to draw His towards itself. That is an axiom of the devout life confirmed

by all experience, even if the tokens of deliverance delay their coming. Such expectance, however patient, is not inconsistent with loud crying, but rather finds voice in it. Silent patience and impatient prayer, in too great a hurry to let God take His own time, are equally imperfect. But the cry, "Haste to my help" (ver. 13), and the final petition, "My God, delay not," are consistent with true waiting.

The suppliant and God have come closer together in ver. 2, which should not be regarded as beginning a new sentence. As in Psalm xviii., prayer brings God down to help. His hand reaches to the man prisoned in a pit or struggling in a swamp; he is dragged out, set on a rock, and feels firm ground beneath his feet. Obviously the whole representation is purely figurative, and it is hopelessly flat and prosaic to refer it to Jeremiah's experience. The "many waters" of Psalm xviii. are a parallel metaphor. The dangers that threatened the psalmist are described as "a pit of destruction," as if they were a dungeon into which whosoever was thrown would come out no more, or in which, like a wild beast, he has been trapped. They are also likened to a bog or quagmire, in which struggles only sink a man deeper. But the edge of the bog touches rock, and there is firm footing and unhindered walking there, if only some great lifting power can drag the sinking man out. God's hand can, and does, because the lips, almost choked with mire, could yet cry. The psalmist's extremity of danger was probably much more desperate than is usual in such conditions as ours, so that his cries seem too piercing for us to make our own; but the terrors and conflicts of humanity are nearly constant quantities, though the occasions calling them forth are widely different. If we look

deeper into life than its surface, we shall learn that it is not violent "spiritualising" to make these utterances the expression of redeeming grace, since in truth there is but one or other of these two possibilities open for us. Either we flounder in a bottomless bog, or we have our feet on the Rock.

God's deliverance gives occasion for fresh praise. The psalmist has to add his voice to the great chorus, and this sense of being but one of a multitude, who have been blessed alike and therefore should bless alike, occasions the significant interchange in ver. 3 of "my" and "our," which needs no theory of the speaker being the nation to explain it. It is ever a joy to the heart swelling with the sense of God's mercies to be aware of the many who share the mercies and gratitude. The cry for deliverance is a solo; the song of praise is choral. The psalmist did not need to be bidden to praise; a new song welled from his lips as by inspiration. Silence was more impossible to his glad heart than even to his sorrow. To shriek for help from the bottom of the pit and to be dumb when lifted to the surface is a churl's part.

Though the song was new in this singer's mouth, as befitted a recipient of deliverances fresh from heaven, the theme was old; but each new voice individualises the commonplaces of religious experience, and repeats them as fresh. And the result of one man's convinced and jubilant voice, giving novelty to old truths because he has verified them in new experiences, will be that "many shall see," as though they behold the deliverance of which they hear, "and shall fear" Jehovah and trust themselves to Him. It was not the psalmist's deliverance, but his song, that was to be the agent in this extension of the fear of Jehovah. All great poets

have felt that their words would win audience and live. Thus, even apart from consciousness of inspiration, this lofty anticipation of the effect of his words is intelligible, without supposing that their meaning is that the signal deliverance of the nation from captivity would spread among heathens and draw them to Israel's faith.

The transition from purely personal experience to more general thoughts is completed in vv. 4, 5. Just as the psalmist began with telling of his own patient expectance and thence passed on to speak of God's help, so in these two verses he sets forth the same sequence in terms studiously cast into the most comprehensive form. Happy indeed are they who can translate their own experience into these two truths for all men: that trust is blessedness and that God's mercies are one long sequence, made up of numberless constituent parts. To have these for one's inmost convictions and to ring them out so clearly and melodiously that many shall be drawn to listen, and then to verify them by their own "seeing," is one reward of patient waiting for Jehovah. That trust must be maintained by resolute resistance to temptations to its opposite. Hence the negative aspect of trust is made prominent in ver. 4 *b*, in which the verb should be rendered "turns not" instead of "respecteth not," as in the A.V. and R.V. The same motion, looked at from opposite sides, may be described in turning to and turning from. Forsaking other confidences is part of the process of making God one's trust. But it is significant that the antithesis is not completely carried out, for those to whom the trustful heart does not turn are not here, as might have been expected, rival objects of trust, but those who put their own trust in false

refuges. "The proud" are the class of arrogantly self-reliant people who feel no need of anything but their own strength to lean on. "Deserters to a lie" are those who fall away from Jehovah to put their trust in any creature, since all refuges but Himself will fail. Idols may be included in this thought of *a lie*, but it is unduly limited if confined to them. Much rather it takes in all false grounds of security. The antithesis fails in accuracy, for the sake of putting emphasis on the prevalence of such mistaken trust, which makes it so much the harder to keep aloof from the multitudes and stand alone in reliance on Jehovah.

Ver. 5 corresponds with ver. 4, in that it sets forth in similar generality the great deeds with which God is wont to answer man's trust. But the personality of the poet breaks very beautifully through the impersonal utterances at two points: once when he names Jehovah as "my God," thus claiming his separate share in the general mercies and his special bond of connection with the Lover of all; and once when he speaks of his own praises, thus recognising the obligation of individual gratitude for general blessings. Each particle of finely comminuted moisture in the rainbow has to flash back the broad sunbeam at its own angle. God's "wonders and designs" are "realised Divine thoughts and Divine thoughts which are gradually being realised" (Delitzsch). These are wrought and being wrought in multitudes innumerable; and, as the psalmist sees the bright, unbroken beams pouring forth from their inexhaustible source, he breaks into an exclamation of adoring wonder at the incomparable greatness of the ever-giving God. "There is none to set beside Thee" is far loftier and more accordant with the tone of the verse than the compara-

tively flat and incongruous remark that God's mercies cannot be told to Him (A.V. and R.V.). A precisely similar exclamation occurs in Psalm lxxi. 19, in which God's incomparable greatness is deduced from the great things which He has done. Happy the singer who has an inexhaustible theme! He is not silenced by the consciousness of the inadequacy of his songs, but rather inspired to the never-ending, ever-beginning, joyful task of uttering some new fragment of that transcendent perfection. Innumerable wonders wrought should be met by ever-new songs. If they cannot be counted, the more reason for open-eyed observance of them as they come, and for a stream of praise as unbroken as is their bright continuance.

If God's mercies thus baffle enumeration and beggar praise, the question naturally rises, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits?" Therefore the next turn of thought shows the psalmist as reaching the lofty spiritual conception that heartfelt delight in God's will is the true response to God's wonders of love. He soars far above external rites as well as servile obedience to unloved authority, and proclaims the eternal and ultimate truth that what God delights in is man's delight in His will. The great words which rang the knell of Saul's kingship may well have sounded in his successor's spirit. Whether they are the source of the language of our psalm or not, they are remarkably similar. "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. xv. 23), teaches precisely the same lesson as vv. 6–8 of this psalm. The strong negation in ver. 6 does not deny the Divine institution of the sacrificial law, but affirms that something much deeper than external sacrifices is the real object of God's desire. The negation is made emphatic by enumerating

the chief kinds of sacrifice. Whether they are bloody or bloodless, whether meant to express consecration or to effect reconciliation, they are none of them the true sacrifices of God. In ver. 6 the psalmist is entirely occupied with God's declarations of His requirements; and he presents these in a remarkable fashion, intercalating the clause, "Ears hast Thou pierced for me," between the two parallel clauses in regard to sacrifice. Why should the connection be thus broken? The fact that God has endowed the psalmist with capacity to apprehend the Divine speech reveals God's desire concerning him. Just because he has ears to hear, it is clear that God wishes him to hear, and therefore that outward acts of worship cannot be the acknowledgment of mercies in which God delights. The central clause of the verse is embedded in the others, because it deals with a Divine act which, pondered, will be seen to establish their teaching. The whole puts in simple, concrete form a wide principle, namely, that the possession of capacity for receiving communications of God's will imposes the duty of loving reception and obedience, and points to inward joyful acceptance of that will as the purest kind of worship.

Vv. 7 and 8 are occupied with the response to God's requirements thus manifested by His gift of capacity to hear His voice. "Then said I." As soon as he had learned the meaning of his ears he found the right use of his tongue. The thankful heart was moved to swift acceptance of the known will of God. The clearest recognition of His requirements may coexist with resistance to them, and needs the impulse of loving contemplation of God's unnumbered wonders to vivify it into glad service. "Behold, I am come," is the language of a servant entering his master's presence in

obedience to his call. In ver. 7 the second clause interrupts just as in ver. 6. There the interruption spoke of the organ of receiving Divine messages as to duty; here it speaks of the messages themselves: "In the roll of the book is my duty prescribed for me." The promise implied in giving ears is fulfilled by giving a permanent written law. This man, having ears to hear, has heard, and has not only heard, but welcomed into the inmost recesses of his heart and will, the declared will of God. The word rendered "delight" in ver. 8 is the same as is rendered "desire" in ver. 6 (A.V.); and that rendered by the A.V. and R.V. in ver. 8 "will" is properly "good pleasure." Thus God's delight and man's coincide. Thankful love assimilates the creature's will with the Divine, and so changes tastes and impulses that desire and duty are fused into one. The prescriptions of the book become the delight of the heart. An inward voice directs. "Love, and do what Thou wilt"; for a will determined by love cannot but choose to please its Beloved. Liberty consists in freely willing and victoriously doing what we ought, and such liberty belongs to hearts whose supreme delight is to please the God whose numberless wonders have won their love and made their thanksgivings poor. The law written in the heart was the ideal even when a law was written on tables of stone. It was the prophetic promise for the Messianic age. It is fulfilled in the Christian life in the measure of its genuineness. Unless the heart delights in the law, acts of obedience count for very little.

The quotation of vv. 7, 8, in Heb. x. 5–7, is mainly from the LXX., which has the remarkable rendering of ver. 6 *b*, "A body hast Thou prepared for me." Probably this is meant as paraphrase rather than as translation;

and it does represent substantially the idea of the original, since the body is the instrument for fulfilling, just as the ear is the organ for apprehending, the uttered will of God. The value of the psalm for the writer of Hebrews does not depend on that clause, but on the whole representation which it gives of the ideal of the perfectly righteous servant's true worship, as involving the setting aside of sacrifice and the decisive pre-eminence of willing obedience. That ideal is fulfilled in Jesus, and really pointed onwards to Him. This use of the quotation does not imply the directly Messianic character of the psalm.

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," and thus the passage is easy from inward delight in God's will to public declaration of His character. Every true lover of God is a witness of His sweetness to the world. Since the psalmist had His law hidden in the depths of his being, he could not "hide" His righteousness within his heart, but must magnify it with his tongue. That is a feeble and doubtful love which knows no necessity of utterance. To "love and be silent" is sometimes imperative, but always burdensome; and a heart happy in its love cannot choose but ripple out in music of speech. The psalmist describes himself as a messenger of glad tidings, a true evangelist. The multiplicity of names for the various aspects of God's character and acts which he heaps together in these verses serves to indicate their manifoldness, which he delighted to contemplate, and his long, loving familiarity with them. He sets his treasure in all lights, and views it from all points, as a man will turn a jewel in his hand and get a fresh flash from every facet. "Righteousness," the good news that the Ruler of all is inflexibly just, with

a justice which scrupulously meets all creatures' needs and becomes penal and awful only to the rejecters of its tender aspect; "faithfulness," the inviolable adherence to every promise; "salvation," the actual fulness of deliverance and well-being flowing from these attributes; 'loving-kindness" and "troth," often linked together as expressing at once the warmth and the unchangeableness of the Divine heart—these have been the psalmist's themes. Therefore they are his hope; and he is sure that, as he has been their singer, they will be his preservers. Ver. 11 is not prayer, but bold confidence. It echoes the preceding verse, since "I did not restrain" (ver. 9) corresponds with "Thou wilt not restrain," and "Thy loving-kindness and Thy troth" with the mention of the same attributes in ver. 10. The psalmist is not so much asserting his claims as giving voice to his faith. He does not so much think that his utterance is deserving of remuneration as that God's character makes impossible the supposition that he, who had so loved and sung His great name in its manifold glories, should find that name unavailing in his hour of need.

There is an undertone of such felt need even in the confidence of ver. 11; and it becomes dominant from ver. 12 to the end, but not so as to overpower the clear note of trust. The difference between the two parts of the psalm is great, but is not to be exaggerated as if it were contrariety. In the former part thanksgiving for deliverance from dangers recently past predominates; in the latter, petition for deliverance from dangers still threatening: but in both the psalmist is exercising the same confidence; and if in the beginning he hymns the praises of God who brought him out of the pit of destruction, in the end he

keeps firm hold of Him as His "Help and Deliverer." Similarly, while in the first portion he celebrates the "purposes which are to usward," in the latter he is certain that, needy as he is, Jehovah has "purposes" of kindness to him. The change of tone is not so complete as to negative the original unity, and surely it is not difficult to imagine a situation in which both halves of the psalm should be appropriate. Are there any deliverances in this perilous and incomplete life so entire and permanent that they leave no room for future perils? Must not prevision of coming dangers accompany thankfulness for past escapes? Our Pharaohs are seldom drowned in the Red Sea, and we do not often see their corpses stretched on the sand. The change of tone, of which so much use is made as against the original unity of the psalm, begins with ver. 12; but that verse has a very strong and beautiful link of connection with the previous part, in the description of besetting evils as innumerable. Both words of ver. 5 are repeated, that for "surpass" or "are more than" in ver. 12 *c*, that for "number" in *a*. The heart that has felt how innumerable are God's thoughts and deeds of love is not utterly reduced to despair, even while it beholds a sea of troubles rolling its white-crested billows shoreward as far as the horizon. The sky stretches beyond them, and the true numberlessness of God's mercies outdoes the great yet really limited range of apparently numberless sins or sorrows, the consequences of sin. "Mine iniquities have overtaken me" like pursuing foes, and every calamity that held him in its grip was a child of a sin of his. Such consciousness of transgression is not inconsistent with "delight in the law of God after the inward man," as Paul found out (Rom. vii. 22, 23), but it sets aside the

attempt to make this a directly Messianic psalm. "I am not able to see." Such is the only possible rendering, for there is no justification for translating the simple word by "look up." Either the crowd of surrounding calamities prevent the psalmist from seeing anything but themselves, or, more probably, the failure of vital power accompanying his sorrow dims his vision (Psalm xxxviii. 10).

From ver. 13 onwards Psalm lxx. repeats this psalm, with unimportant verbal differences. The first of these is the omission of "Be pleased" in ver. 13, which binds this second part to the first, and points back to "Thy pleasure" (ver. 8). The prayer for the confusion of enemies closely resembles that in Psalm xxxv., ver. 14 being almost identical with vv. 4 and 26 there, and ver. 15 recalling ver. 21 of that psalm. The prayer that enemies may fail in their designs is consistent with the most Christlike spirit, and nothing more is asked by the psalmist, but the tinge of satisfaction with which he dwells on their discomfiture, however natural, belongs to the less lofty moral standard of his stage of revelation. He uses extraordinarily forcible words to paint their bewilderment and mortification—may they blush, turn pale, be driven back, be as if paralysed with shame at their baffled malice! The prayer for the gladness of God's servants and seekers is like Psalm xxxv. 27. It asks that fruition as complete as the disappointment of the foes may be the lot of those whose desires set towards God, and it is prophecy as well as prayer. Seekers after God ever find Him, and are more joyful in possession than they hoped to be while seeking. He alone never eludes search, nor ever disappoints attainment. They who long for His salvation will receive it; and their reception will fill

their hearts so full of blessedness that their lips will not be able to refrain from ever-new outbursts of the old praise, "The Lord be magnified."

Very plaintively and touchingly does the low sigh of personal need follow this triumphant intercession for the company of the saints. Its triple elements blend in one believing aspiration, which is not impatience, though it pleads for swift help. "I am afflicted and needy"; there the psalmist turns his eye on his own sore necessity. "Jehovah has purposes for me"; there he turns to God, and links his final petitions with his earlier trust by the repetition of the word by which he described (ver. 5) the many gracious designs of God. "My God, delay not"; there he embraces both in one act of faithful longing. His need calls for, and God's loving counsels ensure, swift response. He who delights when an afflicted and poor man calls Him "my God" will not be slack to vindicate His servant's confidence, and magnify His own name. That appeal goes straight to the heart of God.

PSALM XLI.

Happy the man who considers the helpless;
In the day of calamity will Jehovah deliver him.
2 Jehovah will preserve him and keep him alive,
—He shall be counted happy in the land,—
And do not Thou give him up to the wrath of his enemies.
3 Jehovah will sustain him on the bed of languishing;
All his lying down in his sickness Thou hast turned into health.

4 As for me, I said, Jehovah, be merciful to me,
Heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee.
5 My enemies speak evil against me:
"When will he die, and his name perish?"
6 And if one [of them] comes to see [me], he speaks falsehood (insincere sympathy);
His heart collects malice for itself;
He goes forth, he speaks it.

7 Together against me do all my haters whisper;
Against me they plan my hurt:
8 "A fatal thing is fixed upon him,
And he who has [now] lain down will rise no more."
9 Even the man of my peace, in whom I trusted, who ate my bread,
Has lifted his heel against me.

10 But Thou, Jehovah, be merciful to me and raise me up,
That I may requite them.
11 By this I know that Thou delightest in me,
Since my enemy triumphs not over me.
12 And as for me, in my integrity Thou upholdest me,
And settest me before Thy face for ever.

13 Blessed be Jehovah, the God of Israel,
From everlasting and to everlasting
Amen and Amen.

THE central mass of this psalm describes the singer as suffering from two evils: sickness and treacherous friends. This situation naturally leads up

to the prayer and confidence of the closing strophe (vv. 10–12). But its connection with the introductory verses (1–3) is less plain. A statement of the blessings ensured to the compassionate seems a singular introduction to the psalmist's pathetic exhibition of his sorrows. Cheyne thinks that the opening verses were added by the framer of the collection to adapt the poem to the use of the Church of his own time, and that "the original opening must have been different" ("Orig. of Psalt.," 246, *n.*). It is to be observed, however, that the two points of the psalmist's affliction are the two from which escape is assured to the compassionate, who shall not be "delivered to the desire of his enemies," and shall be supported and healed in sickness. Probably, therefore, the general promises of vv. 1–3 are silently applied by the psalmist to himself; and he is comforting his own sorrow with the assurance which in his humility he casts into impersonal form. He has been merciful, and believes, though things look dark, that he will obtain mercy. There is probably also an intentional contrast with the cruel exacerbation of his sufferings by uncompassionate companions, which has rubbed salt into his wounds. He has a double consciousness in these opening verses, inasmuch as he partly thinks of himself as the compassionate man and partly as the "weak" one who is compassionated.

The combination of sickness and treachery is remarkable, especially if the former is taken literally, as the strongly marked details seem to require. The sick man is visited by an insincere sympathiser, who is all eyes to note symptoms of increasing weakness, and all tongue, as soon as he gets out of the sick-room, to give the result, which is to his malice the better the worse it is. Such a picture looks as if drawn from life, and the

sketch of the traitor friend seems to be a portrait of a real person. The supporters of the post-exilic date and national interpretation of the psalm have not succeeded in pointing out who the false friends of Israel were, who seemed to condole with, and really rejoiced over, its weakness, or who were the treacherous allies who failed it. The theory of the Davidic origin has in its favour the correspondence of Ahithophel's treason with the treachery of the trusted friend in the psalm; and, while it must be admitted that there is no mention of sickness in the narrative in 2 Samuel, the supposition that trouble of conscience had brought illness gains some countenance from Psalm xxxii., if it is Davidic, and would naturally explain David's singular passiveness whilst Absalom was hatching his plot.

The psalm may be divided into four strophes, of which, however, the two middle ones cohere very closely. Vv. 1–3 give the mercy requited to the merciful; vv. 4–6, after a brief prayer and confession begin the picture of the psalmist's sufferings, which is carried on through the next strophe (vv. 7–9), with the difference that in the former the scene is mainly the sick man's chamber, and in the latter the meeting-place of the secret conspirators. Vv. 10–12 build on this picture of distress a prayer for deliverance, and rise to serene confidence in its certain answer. The closing doxology is not part of the psalm, but is appended as the conclusion of the first book of the Psalter.

The principle that God's dealings with us correspond to our dealings with men, as clouds are moulded after the curves of the mountains which they touch, is no less characteristic of the New Testament than of the Old. The merciful obtain mercy; God forgives those

who forgive their brethren. The absoluteness of statement in this psalm is, of course, open to misunderstanding; but the singer had not such a superficial view of his relations to God as to suppose that kindly sympathy was the sole condition of Divine compassion. That virtue, the absence of which added pangs to his pains, might well seem to a sufferer writhing under the bitterness of its opposite the Divinest of all excellencies, and worthiest of recompense. That its requital should be mainly considered as consisting in temporal deliverance and physical health is partly due to the characteristics of the Old Testament promises of blessedness, and partly to the psalmist's momentary needs. We have noted that these are reflected in the blessings promised in vv. 1–3. The "happy" of ver. 1 is caught up in the abruptly introduced "He shall be counted happy" of ver. 2, which may carry tacit reference to the malicious slanders that aggravated the psalmist's sufferings, and anticipates deliverance so perfect that all who see him shall think him fortunate. The next clause rises into direct address of Jehovah, and is shown by the form of the negative in the Hebrew to be petition, not assertion, thus strongly confirming the view that "me" lurks below "him" in this context. A similar transition from the third to the second person occurs in ver. 3, as if the psalmist drew closer to his God. There is also a change of tense in the verbs there: "Jehovah *will* sustain"; "Thou *hast* turned," the latter tense converting the general truth expressed in the former clause into a fact of experience. The precise meaning of this verse is questioned, some regarding both clauses as descriptive of tender nursing, which sustains the drooping head and smoothes the crumpled bedding, while others, noting that the word rendered "bed"

(A.V. and R.V.) in the second clause means properly "lying down," take that clause as descriptive of turning sickness into convalescence. The latter meaning gives a more appropriate ending to the strophe, as it leaves the sick man healed, not tossing on a disordered bed, as the other explanation does. Jehovah does not half cure.

The second and third strophes (vv. 4–9) are closely connected. In them the psalmist recounts his sorrows and pains, but first breathes a prayer for mercy, and bases it no longer on his mercifulness, but on his sin. Only a shallow experience will find contradiction here to either the former words, or to the later profession of "integrity" (ver. 12). The petition for soul-healing does not prove that sickness in the following verses is figurative, but results from the belief that sorrow is the effect of sin, a view which belongs to the psalmist's stage of revelation, and is not to be held by Christians in the same absolute fashion. If the Davidic origin of the psalm is recognised, the connection of the king's great sin with all his after-sorrows is patent. However he had been merciful and compassionate in general, his own verdict on the man in Nathan's parable was that he "showed no pity," and that sin bore bitter fruit in all his life. It was the parent of all the sensual outrages in his own house; it underlay Ahithophel's treachery; it had much to do in making his reign abhorred; it brought the fuel which Absalom fired, and if our supposition is right as to the origin of the sickness spoken of in this psalm, that sin and the remorse that followed it gnawed at the roots of bodily health. So the psalmist, if he is indeed the royal sinner, had need to pray for soul-healing first, even though he was conscious of much compassion and hoped for its recompense. While

he speaks thus to Jehovah, his enemies speak in a different tone. The "evil" which they utter is not calumny, but malediction. Their hatred is impatient for his death. The time seems long till they can hear of it. One of them comes on a hypocritical visit of solicitude ("see" is used for visiting the sick in 2 Kings viii. 29), and speaks lying condolence, while he greedily collects encouraging symptoms that the disease is hopeless. Then he hurries back to tell how much worse he had found the patient; and that ignoble crew delight in the good news, and send it flying. This very special detail goes strongly in favour of the view that we have in this whole description a transcript of literal, personal experience. There were plenty of concealed enemies round David in the early stages of Absalom's conspiracy, who would look eagerly for signs of his approaching death, which might save the need of open revolt and plunge the kingdom into welcome confusion. The second strophe ends with the exit of the false friend.

The third (vv. 7–9) carries him to the meeting-place of the plotters, who eagerly receive and retail the good news that the sick man is worse. They feed their ignoble hate by picturing further ill as laying hold of him. Their wish is parent to their thought, which is confirmed by the report of their emissary. "A thing of Belial is poured out on him," or "is fastened upon him," say they. That unusual expression may refer either to moral or physical evil. In the former sense it would here mean the sufferer's sin, in the latter a fatal disease. The connection makes the physical reference the more likely. This incurable disease is conceived of as "poured out," or perhaps as "molten on him," so that it cannot be separated from him.

Therefore he will never rise from his sick-bed. But even this murderous glee is not the psalmist's sharpest pang. "The man of my peace," trusted, honoured, admitted to the privileges, and therefore bound by the obligations, of hospitality so sacred in the old world, has kicked the prostrate sufferer, as the ass in the fable did the sick lion. The treachery of Ahithophel at once occurs to mind. No doubt many treacherous friends have wounded many trustful hearts, but the correspondence of David's history with this detail is not to be got rid of by the observation that treachery is common. Still less is it sufficient to quote Obad. 7, where substantially the same language is employed in reference to the enemies of Edom, as supporting the national reference of the present passage. No one denies that false allies may be described by such a figure, or that nations may be personified; but is there any event in the post-exilic history which shows Israel deceived and spurned by trusted allies? The Davidic authorship and the personal reference of the psalm are separable. But if the latter is adopted, it will be hard to find any circumstances answering so fully to the details of the psalm as the Absalomic rebellion and Ahithophel's treason. Our Lord's quotation of part of ver. 9, with the significant omission of "in whom I trusted," does not imply the Messianic character of the psalm, but is an instance of an event and a saying which were not meant as prophetic, finding fuller realisation in the life of the perfect type of suffering godliness than in the original sufferer.

The last strophe (vv. 10–12) recurs to prayer, and soars to confidence born of communion. A hand stretched out in need and trust soon comes back filled with blessings. Therefore here the moment of true

petition is the moment of realised answer. The prayer traverses the malicious hopes of enemies. They had said, "He will rise no more"; it prays, "Raise me up." It touches a note which sounds discordant in the desire "that I may requite them"; and it is far more truly reverential and appreciative of the progress of revelation to recognise the relative inferiority of the psalmist's wish to render *quid pro quo* than to put violence on his words, in order to harmonise them with Christian ethics, or to slur over the distinction between the Law, of which the keynote was retribution, and the Gospel, of which it is forgiveness.

But the last words of the psalm are sunny with the assurance of present favour and with boundless hope. The man is still lying on his sick-bed, ringed by whispering foes. There is no change without, but this change has passed: that he has tightened his hold of God, and therefore can feel that his enemies' whispers will never rise or swell into a shout of victory over him. He can speak of the future deliverance as if present; and he can look ahead over an indefinite stretch of sunlit country, scarcely knowing whether the furthest point is earth or no. His integrity is not sinless, nor does he plead it as a reason for Jehovah's upholding, but hopes for it as the consequence of His sustaining hand. He knows that he will have close approach to Jehovah; and though, no doubt, "for ever" on his lips meant less than it does on ours, his assurance of continuous communion with God reached, if not to actual, clear consciousness of immortality, at all events to assurance of a future so indefinitely extended, and so brightened by the sunlight of God's face, that it wanted but little additional extension or brightening to be the full assurance of life immortal.

BOOK II.

PSALMS XLII.—LXXII.

PSALMS XLII., XLIII.

PSALM XLII.

1 Like a hind which pants after the water-brooks,
So pants my soul after Thee, O God.
2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God;
When shall I come and appear before God?
3 My tears have been bread to me day and night,
While they say to me all the day, Where is thy God?
4 This would I remember, and pour out my soul in me,
How I went with the throng, led them in procession to the house of God,
With shrill cries of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.
5 Why art thou bowed down, my soul, and moanest within me?
Hope in God, for I shall yet give Him thanks,
[As] the help of my countenance and my God.

6 Within me is my soul bowed down;
Therefore let me remember Thee from the land of Jordan and of the Hermons, from Mount Mizar.
7 Flood calls to flood at the voice of Thy cataracts;
All Thy breakers and rollers are gone over me.
8 [Yet] by day will Jehovah command His loving-kindness,
And in the night shall a song to Him be with me,
[Even] a prayer to the God of my life.
9 Let me say to God my Rock, Why hast Thou forgotten me?
Why must I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?
10 As if they crushed my bones, my adversaries reproach me,
Whilst all the day they say to me, Where is thy God?
11 Why art thou bowed down, my soul, and why moanest thou within me?
Hope thou in God, for I shall yet give Him thanks
[As] the help of my countenance and my God.

PSALM XLIII.

1 Do me right, O God, and plead my plea against a loveless nation;
From the man of fraud and mischief rescue me.
2 For Thou art God my stronghold; why hast Thou cast me off?
Why must I wearily go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?
3 Send out Thy light and Thy troth; let them lead me;
Let them bring me to Thy holy hill and to Thy tabernacles,
4 That I may come in to the altar of God,
To God, the gladness of my joy,
And give Thee thanks with the harp, O God, my God.
5 Why art thou bowed down, my soul, and why moanest thou within me?
Hope in God, for I shall yet give Him thanks,
[As] the help of my countenance and my God.

THE second book of the Psalter is characterised by the use of the Divine name "Elohim" instead of "Jehovah." It begins with a cluster of seven psalms (reckoning Psalms xlii. and xliii. as one) of which the superscription is most probably regarded as ascribing their authorship to "the sons of Korach." These were Levites, and (according to 1 Chron. ix. 19 *seq.*) the office of keepers of the door of the sanctuary had been hereditary in their family from the time of Moses. Some of them were among the faithful adherents of David at Ziklag (1 Chron. xii. 6), and in the new model of worship inaugurated by him the Korachites were doorkeepers and musicians. They retained the former office in the second Temple (Neh. xi. 19). The ascription of authorship to a group is remarkable, and has led to the suggestion that the superscription does not specify the authors, but the persons for whose use the psalms in question were composed. The Hebrew would bear either meaning; but if the latter is adopted, all these psalms are anonymous. The same construction is found in Book I. in Psalms xxv.–xxviii., xxxv.,

xxxvii., where it is obviously the designation of authorship, and it is naturally taken to have the same force in these Korachite psalms. It has been ingeniously conjectured by Delitzsch that the Korachite Psalms originally formed a separate collection entitled "Songs of the Sons of Korach," and that this title afterwards passed over into the superscriptions when they were incorporated in the Psalter. It may have been so, but the supposition is unnecessary. It was not exactly literary fame which psalmists hungered for. The actual author, as one of a band of kinsmen who worked and sang together, would, not unnaturally, be content to sink his individuality and let his song go forth as that of the band. Clearly the superscriptions rested upon some tradition or knowledge, else defective information would not have been acknowledged as it is in this one; but some name would have been coined to fill the gap.

The two psalms (xlii., xliii.) are plainly one. The absence of a title for the second, the identity of tone throughout, the recurrence of several phrases, and especially of the refrain, put this beyond doubt. The separation, however, is old, since it is found in the LXX. It is useless to speculate on its origin.

There is much in the psalms which favours the hypothesis that the author was a Korachite companion of David's in his flight before Absalom; but the locality described as that of the singer, does not entirely correspond to that of the king's retreat, and the description of the enemies is not easily capable of application in all points to his foes. The house of God is still standing; the poet has been there recently, and hopes soon to return and render praise. Therefore the psalm must be pre-exilic; and while there is no certainty attainable as to date, it may at least be said that the circum-

stances of the singer present more points of contact with those of the supposed Korachite follower of David's fortunes on the uplands across Jordan than with those of any other of the imaginary persons to whom modern criticism has assigned the poem. Whoever wrote it has given immortal form to the longings of the soul after God. He has fixed for ever and made melodious a sigh.

The psalm falls into three parts, each closing with the same refrain. Longings and tears, remembrances of festal hours passed in the sanctuary melt the singer's soul, while taunting enemies hiss continual sarcasms at him as forsaken by his God. But his truer self silences these lamentations, and cheers the feebler "soul" with clear notes of trust and hope, blown in the refrain, like some trumpet-clang rallying dispirited fugitives to the fight. The stimulus serves for a moment; but once more courage fails, and once more, at yet greater length and with yet sadder tones, plaints and longings are wailed forth. Once more, too, the higher self repeats its half-rebuke, half-encouragement. So ends the first of the psalms; but obviously it is no real ending, for the victory over fear is not won, and longing has not become blessed. So once more the wave of emotion rolls over the psalmist, but with a new aspect which makes all the difference. He prays now; he had only remembered and complained and said that he would pray before. Therefore now he triumphs, and though he still is keenly conscious of his enemies, they appear but for a moment, and, though he still feels that he is far from the sanctuary, his heart goes out in hopeful visions of the gladness of his return thither, and he already tastes the rapture of the joy that will then flood his heart. Therefore the refrain comes for

a third time; and this time the longing, trembling soul continues at the height to which the better self has lifted it, and silently acknowledges that it need not have been cast down. Thus the whole song is a picture of a soul climbing, not without backward slips, from the depths to the heights, or, in another aspect, of the transformation of longing into certainty of fruition, which is itself fruition after a kind.

Perhaps the singer had seen, during his exile on the eastern side of Jordan, some gentle creature, with open mouth and heaving flanks, eagerly seeking in dry wadies for a drop of water to cool her outstretched tongue; and the sight had struck on his heart as an image of himself longing for the presence of God in the sanctuary. A similar bit of local colour is generally recognised in ver. 7. Nature reflects the poet's moods, and overmastering emotion sees its own analogues everywhere. That lovely metaphor has touched the common heart as few have done, and the solitary singer's plaint has fitted all devout lips. Injustice is done it, if it is regarded merely as the longing of a Levite for approach to the sanctuary. No doubt the psalmist connected communion with God and presence in the Temple more closely together than they should do who have heard the great charter, "neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem"; but, however the two things were coupled in his mind, they were sufficiently separate to allow of approach by longing and prayer while distant in body, and the true object of yearning was not access to the Temple, but communion with the God of the Temple.

The "soul" is feminine in Hebrew, and is here compared to the female deer, for "pants" is the feminine form of the verb, though its noun is masculine. It is

better therefore to translate "hind" than "hart." The "soul" is the seat of emotions and desires. It "pants" and "thirsts," is "cast down" and disquieted; it is "poured out"; it can be bidden to "hope." Thus tremulous, timid, mobile, it is beautifully compared to a hind. The true object of its longings is always God, however little it knows for what it is thirsting. But they are happy in their very yearnings who are conscious of the true direction of these, and can say that it is God for whom they are athirst. All unrest of longing, all fever of thirst, all outgoings of desire, are feelers put out blindly, and are only stilled when they clasp Him. The correspondence between man's needs and their true object is involved in that name "the living God"; for a heart can rest only in one all-sufficient Person, and must have a heart to throb against. Neither abstractions nor dead things can still its cravings. That which does must be living. But no finite being can still them; and after all sweetnesses of human loves and helps of human strengths, the soul's thirst remains unslaked, and the Person who is enough must be the living God. The difference between the devout and the worldly man is just that the one can only say, "My soul pants and thirsts," and the other can add "after Thee, O God."

This man's longing was intensified by his unwilling exile from the sanctuary, a special privation to a door-keeper of the Temple. His situation and mood closely resemble those in another Korachite psalm (lxxxiv.), in which, as here, the soul "faints for the courts of the Lord," and as here the panting hind, so there the glancing swallows flitting about the eaves are woven into the song. Unnamed foes taunt the psalmist with the question, "Where is thy God?" There is no

necessity to conclude that these were heathens, though the taunt is usually put into heathen lips (Psalms lxxix. 10; lii. 2) but it would be quite as natural from co-religionists, flouting his fervour and personal grasp of God and taking his sorrows as tokens of God's abandonment of him. That is the world's way with the calamities of a devout man, whose humble cry, "My God," it resents as presumption or hypocrisy.

But even these bitter sarcasms are less bitter than the remembrance of "happier things," which is his "sorrow's crown of sorrow." Yet, with the strange but universal love of summoning up remembrance of departed joys, the psalmist finds a certain pleasure in the pain of recalling how he, a Levite, led the festal march to the Temple, and in listening in fancy again to the shrill cries of joy which broke from the tumultuous crowd. The form of the verbs "remember" and "pour out" in ver. 4 indicates set purpose.

The higher self arrests this flow of self-pity and lamentation. The feminine soul has to give account of her moods to calmer judgment, and to be lifted and steadied by the strong spirit. The preceding verses have given ample reason why she has been dejected, but now she is summoned to repeat them to a judicial ear. The insufficiency of the circumstances described to warrant the vehement emotions expressed is implied in the summons. Feeling has to vindicate its rationality or to suppress itself, and its grounds have often only to be stated to the better self, to be found altogether disproportioned to the storm they have raised. It is a very elementary but necessary lesson for the conduct of life that emotion of all sorts, sad or glad, religious or other, needs rigid scrutiny and firm control, sometimes stimulating and sometimes chilling. The true

counterpoise to its excess lies in directing it to God and in making Him the object of hope and patient waiting. Emotion varies, but God is the same. The facts on which faith feeds abide while faith fluctuates. The secret of calm is to dwell in that inner chamber of the secret place of the Most High, which whoso inhabits "heareth not the loud winds when they call," and is neither dejected nor uplifted, neither disturbed by excessive joys nor torn by anxieties.

Ver. 5 has the refrain in a form slightly different from that of the other two instances of its occurrence (ver. 11 and xliii. 5). But probably the text is faulty. The shifting of the initial word of ver. 6 to the end of ver. 5, and the substitution of *My* for *His*, bring the three refrains into line, and avoid the harsh expression "help of His countenance." Since no reason for the variation is discernible, and the proposed slight change of text improves construction and restores uniformity, it is probably to be adopted. If it is, the second part of the psalm is also conformed to the other two in regard to its not beginning with the Divine name.

The break in the clouds is but momentary, and the grey wrack fills the sky once more. The second part of the psalm takes up the question of the refrain, and first reiterates with bitter emphasis that the soul *is* bowed down, and then pours out once more the stream of reasons for dejection. But the curb has not been applied quite in vain, for throughout the succeeding verses there is a striking alternation of despondency and hope. Streaks of brightness flash through the gloom. Sorrow is shot with trust. This conflict of opposite emotions is the characteristic of the second part of the psalm, while that of the first part is an all but unrelieved predominance of gloom, and that of

the third an all but undisputed victory of sunshine. Naturally this transition strophe is marked by the mingling of both. In the former part, memory was the handmaid of sorrow, and came involuntarily, and increased the singer's pain; but in this part he makes an effort of will to remember, and in remembrance finds an antidote to sorrow. To recall past joys adds stings to present grief, but to remember God brings an anodyne for the smart. The psalmist is far from the sanctuary, but distance does not hinder thought. This man's faith was not so dependent on externals that it could not come close to God while distant from His temple. It had been so far strengthened by the encouragement of the refrain that the reflux of sadness at once rouses it to action. "My soul is cast down; . . . *therefore* let me remember Thee." With wise resolve he finds in dejection a reason for nestling closer to God. In reference to the description of the psalmist's locality, Cheyne beautifully says, "The preposition 'from' is chosen (rather than 'in') with a subtle purpose. It suggests that the psalmist's faith will bridge over the interval between himself and the sanctuary: 'I can send my thoughts to Thee from the distant frontier'" (*in loc.*). The region intended seems to be "the north-eastern corner of Palestine, near the lower slopes of Hermon" (Cheyne, *u.s.*). The plural "Hermons" is probably used in reference to the group of crests. "Mizar" is probably the name of a hill otherwise unknown, and specifies the singer's locality more minutely, though not helpfully to us. Many ingenious attempts have been made to explain the name either as symbolical or as a common noun, and not a proper name, but these need not be dealt with here. The locality thus designated is too far north for the scene of David's retreat before

Absalom, unless we give an unusual southward extension to the names; and this makes a difficulty in the way of accepting the hypothesis of the author's having been in his retinue.

The twofold emotions of ver. 6 recur in vv. 7, 8, where we have first renewed despondency and then reaction into hope. The imagery of floods lifting up their voices, and cataracts sounding as they fall, and breaking waves rolling over the half-drowned psalmist has been supposed to be suggested by the scenery in which he was; but the rushing noise of Jordan in its rocky bed seems scarcely enough to deserve being described as "flood calling to flood," and "breakers and rollers" is an exaggeration if applied to any commotion possible on such a stream. The imagery is so usual that it needs no assumption of having been occasioned by the poet's locality. The psalmist paints his calamities as storming on him in dismal continuity, each "flood" seeming to summon its successor. They rush upon him, multitudinous and close following; they pour down on him as with the thunder of descending cataracts; they overwhelm him like the breakers and rollers of an angry ocean. The bold metaphors are more striking when contrasted with the opposite ones of the first part. The dry and thirsty land there and the rush of waters here mean the same thing, so flexible is nature in a poet's hands.

Then follows a gleam of hope, like a rainbow spanning the waterfall. With the alternation of mood already noticed as characteristic, the singer looks forward, even from the midst of overwhelming seas of trouble, to a future day when God will give His angel, Mercy or Loving-kindness, charge concerning him and draw him out of many waters. That day of extrication will surely

be followed by a night of music and of thankful prayer (for supplication is not the only element in prayer) to Him who by His deliverance has shown Himself to be the "God of" the rescued man's "life." The epithet answers to that of the former part, "the living God," from which it differs by but one additional letter. He who has life in Himself is the Giver and Rescuer of our lives, and to Him they are to be rendered in thankful sacrifice. Once more the contending currents meet in vv. 9 and 10, in the former of which confidence and hope utter themselves in the resolve to appeal to God and in the name given to Him as "my Rock"; while another surge of despondency breaks, in the question in which the soul interrogates God, as the better self had interrogated her, and contrasts almost reproachfully God's apparent forgetfulness, manifested by His delay in deliverance, with her remembrance of Him. It is not a question asked for enlightenment's sake, but is an exclamation of impatience, if not of rebuke. Ver. 10 repeats the enemies' taunt, which is there represented as like crushing blows which broke the bones. And then once more above this conflict of emotion soars the clear note of the refrain, summoning to self-command, calmness, and unfaltering hope.

But the victory is not quite won, and therefore Psalm xliii. follows. It is sufficiently distinct in tone to explain its separation from the preceding, inasmuch as it is prayer throughout, and the note of joy is dominant, even while an undertone of sadness links it with the previous parts. The unity is vouched by the considerations already noticed, and by the incompleteness of Psalm xlii. without such triumphant close and of Psalm xliii. without such despondent beginning. The prayer of vv. 1, 2, blends the two elements, which were

at war in the second part; and for the moment the darker is the more prominent. The situation is described as in the preceding parts. The enemy is called a "loveless nation." The word rendered "loveless" is compounded of the negative prefix and the word which is usually found with the meaning of "one whom God favours," or visits with loving-kindness. It has been much disputed whether its proper signification is active (one who shows loving-kindness) or passive (one who receives it). But, considering that loving-kindness is in the Psalter mainly a Divine attribute, and that, when a human excellence, it is regarded as derived from and being the echo of experienced Divine mercy, it is best to take the passive meaning as the principal, though sometimes, as unmistakably here, the active is more suitable. These loveless people are not further defined, and may either have been Israelites or aliens. Perhaps there was one "man" of special mischief prominent among them, but it is not safe to treat that expression as anything but a collective. Ver. 2 looks back to xlii. 9, the former clause in each verse being practically equivalent, and the second in xliii. being a quotation of the second in ver. 9, with a variation in the form of the verb to suggest more vividly the picture of weary, slow, dragging gait, fit for a man clad in mourning garb.

But the gloomier mood has shot its last bolt. Grief which finds no fresh words is beginning to dry up. The stage of mechanical repetition of complaints is not far from that of cessation of them. So the higher mood conquers at last, and breaks into a burst of joyous petition, which passes swiftly into realisation of the future joys whose coming shines thus far off. Hope and trust hold the field. The certainty of

return to the Temple overbears the pain of absence from it, and the vivid realisation of the gladness of worshipping again at the altar takes the place of the vivid remembrance of former festal approach thither. It is the prerogative of faith to make pictures drawn by memory pale beside those painted by hope. Light and Troth—*i.e.*, Loving-kindness and Faithfulness in fulfilling promises—are like two angels, despatched from the presence-chamber of God, to guide with gentleness the exile's steps. That is to say, because God is mercy and faithfulness, the return of the psalmist to the home of his heart is sure. God being what He is, no longing soul can ever remain unsatisfied. The actual return to the Temple is desired because thereby new praise will be occasioned. Not mere bodily presence there, but that joyful outpouring of triumph and gladness, is the object of the psalmist's longing. He began with yearning after the living God. In his sorrow he could still think of Him at intervals as the help of his countenance and call Him "my God." He ends with naming Him "the gladness of my joy." Whoever begins as he did will finish where he climbed. The refrain is repeated for a third time, and is followed by no relapse into sadness. The effort of faith should be persistent, even if old bitternesses begin again and "break the low beginnings of content"; for, even if the wild waters burst through the dam once and again, they do not utterly wash it away. and there remains a foundation on which it may be built up anew. Each swing of the gymnast lifts him higher, until he is on a level with a firm platform on which he can spring and stand secure. Faith may have a long struggle with fear, but it will have the last word, and that word will be "the help of my countenance and my God."

PSALM XLIV.

1 O God, with our ears we have heard,
Our fathers have told to us,
The work Thou didst work in their days,
In the days of yore.
2 Thou [with] Thy hand didst dispossess nations, and didst plant *them*,
Didst afflict peoples and spread *them* forth.
3 For not by their own sword did they possess the land,
And their own arm did not save them,
But Thy right hand and Thine arm, and the light of Thy face,
Because Thou hadst delight in them.
4 Thou Thyself art my King, O God;
Command salvations for Jacob.
5 Through Thee can we butt down our oppressors;
In Thy name can we trample those that rise against us.
6 For not in my own bow do I trust,
And my own sword does not save me.
7 But Thou hast saved us from our oppressors,
And our haters Thou hast put to shame.
8 In God have we made our boast all the day,
And Thy name will we thank for ever. Selah.

9 Yet Thou hast cast [us] off and shamed us,
And goest not forth with our hosts.
10 Thou makest us turn back from the oppressor,
And our haters plunder to their hearts' content.
11 Thou makest us like sheep for food,
And among the nations hast Thou scattered us.
12 Thou sellest Thy people at no profit,
And hast not increased [Thy wealth] by their price.
13 Thou makest us a reproach for our neighbours,
A mockery and derision to those around us.
14 Thou makest us a proverb among the nations,
A nodding of the head among the peoples.

15 All the day is my dishonour before me,
And the shame of my face has covered me,
16 Because of the voice of the rebuker and blasphemer,
Because of the face of the enemy and the revengeful.

17 All this is come upon us, and [yet] have we not forgotten Thee,
Nor been false to Thy covenant.
18 Our heart has not turned back,
Nor our footsteps swerved from Thy way,
19 That Thou shouldest have crushed us in the place of jackals,
And covered us with thick darkness.
20 If we had forgotten the name of our God
And spread out our hands to a strange God,
21 Would not God search out this? for He knows the secrets of the heart.
22 Nay, for Thy sake are we killed all the day;
We are reckoned as sheep for slaughter.

23 Awake; why sleepest Thou, Lord?
Arise; cast not off for ever.
24 Why hidest Thou Thy face,
Forgettest our affliction and oppression?
25 For bowed to the dust is our soul;
Our body cleaves to the earth.
26 Arise [for] a help for us,
And redeem us for Thy loving-kindness' sake.

CALVIN says that the authorship of this psalm is uncertain, but that it is abundantly clear that it was composed by any one rather than David, and that its plaintive contents suit best the time when the savage tyranny of Antiochus raged. No period corresponds to the situation which makes the background of the psalm so completely as the Maccabean, for only then could it be truly said that national calamities fell because of the nation's rigid monotheism. Other epochs have been thought of, so as to avoid the necessity of recognising Maccabean psalms, but none of them can be said to meet the conditions described in the psalm. The choice lies between accepting the Maccabean date and giving up the attempt to fix one at all

Objections to that late date based upon the history of the completion of the canon take for granted more accurate and complete knowledge of a very obscure subject than is possessed, and do not seem strong enough to negative the indications arising from the very unique fact, asserted in the psalm, that the nation was persecuted for its faith and engaged in a religious war. The psalm falls into four parts: a wistful look backwards to days already "old," when God fought for them (vv. 1–8); a sad contrast in present oppression (vv. 9–16); a profession of unfaltering national adherence to the covenant notwithstanding all these ills (vv. 17–22); and a fervent cry to a God who seems asleep to awake and rescue His martyred people (vv. 23–26).

The first part (vv. 1–8) recalls the fact that shone so brightly in all the past, the continual exercise of Divine power giving victory to their weakness, and builds thereon a prayer that the same law of His providence might be fulfilled now. The bitter side of the retrospect forces itself into consciousness in the next part, but here Memory is the handmaid of Faith. The whole process of the Exodus and conquest of Canaan is gathered up as one great "work" of God's hand. The former inhabitants of the land were uprooted like old trees, to give room for planting the "vine out of Egypt." Two stages in the settlement are distinguished in ver. 2: first came the "planting" and next the growth; for the phrase "didst spread them forth" carries on the metaphor of the tree, and expresses the extension of its roots and branches. The ascription of victory to God is made more emphatic by the negatives in ver. 3, which take away all credit of it from the people's own weapons or strength. The consciousness of our own impotence must accompany

adequate recognition of God's agency in our deliverances. The conceit of our own power blinds our vision of His working hand. But what moved His power? No merit of man's, but the infinite free grace of God's heart. "The light of Thy face" is the symbol of God's loving regard, and the deepest truth as to His acts of favour is that they are the outcome of His own merciful nature. He is His own motive. "Thou hadst delight in them" is the ultimate word, leading us into sacred abysses of self-existent and self-originated Deity. The spirit, then, of Israel's history is contained in these three thoughts: the positive assertion of God's power as the reason for their victories; the confirmatory negative, putting aside their own prowess; and the tracing of all God's work for them solely to His unmerited grace.

On this grand generalisation of the meaning of past centuries a prayer is built for their repetition in the prosaic present. The psalmist did not think that God was nearer in some majestic past than now. His unchangeableness had for consequence, as he thought, continuous manifestation of Himself in the same character and relation to His people. To-day is as full of God as any yesterday. Therefore ver. 4 begins with an emphatic recognition of the constancy of the Divine nature in that strong expression "Thou Thyself," and with an individualising transition for a moment to the singular in "my King," in order to give most forcible utterance to the thought that He was the same to each man of that generation as He had been to the fathers. On that unchanging relation rests the prayer, "Command salvations for (lit. *of*) Jacob," as if a multitude of several acts of deliverance stood before God, as servants waiting to

be sent on His errands. Just as God (Elohim) takes the place of Jehovah in this second book of the Psalter, so in it Jacob frequently stands for Israel. The prayer is no sooner spoken than the confidence in its fulfilment lifts the suppliant's heart buoyantly above present defeat, which will in the next turn of thought insist on being felt. Such is the magic of every act of true appeal to God. However dark the horizon, there is light if a man looks straight up. Thus this psalmist breaks into anticipatory pæans of victory. The vivid image of ver. 5 is taken from the manner of fighting common to wild horned animals, buffaloes and the like, who first prostrate their foe by their fierce charge and then trample him. The individualising "my" reappears in ver. 6, where the negation that had been true of the ancestors is made his own by the descendant. Each man must, as his own act, appropriate the universal relation of God to men and make God his God, and must also disown for himself reliance on himself. So he will enter into participation in God's victories. Remembrance of the victorious past and confidence in a like victorious future blend in the closing burst of praise and vow for its continuance, which vow takes for granted the future continued manifestation of deliverances as occasions for uninterrupted thanksgivings. Well might some long-drawn, triumphant notes from the instruments prolong the impression of the jubilant words.

The song drops in the second part (vv. 9–16) from these clear heights with lyric suddenness. The grim facts of defeat and consequent exposure to mocking laughter from enemies force themselves into sight, and seem utterly to contradict the preceding verses. But the first part speaks with the voice of faith, and the

second with that of sense, and these two may sound in very close sequence or even simultaneously. In ver. 9 the two verbs are united by the absence of "us" with the first; and the difference of tense in the Hebrew brings out the dependence of the second on the first, as effect and cause. God's rejection is the reason for the nation's disgrace by defeat. In the subsequent verses the thoughts of rejection and disgrace are expanded, the former in ver. 9 *b* to ver. 12, and the latter in vv. 13–16. The poet paints with few strokes the whole disastrous rout. We see the fated band going out to battle, with no Pillar of Cloud or Ark of the Covenant at their head. They have but their own weapons and sinews to depend on—not, as of old, a Divine Captain. No description of a fight under such conditions is needed, for it can have only one issue; and so the next clause shows panic-struck flight. Whoever goes into battle without God comes out of it without victory. Next follows plundering, as was the savage wont of these times, and there is no force to oppose the spoilers. The routed fugitives are defenceless and unresisting as sheep, and their fate is to be devoured, or possibly the expression "sheep for food" may be substantially equivalent to "sheep for the slaughter" (ver. 22), and may refer to the usual butchery of a defeated army. Some of them are slain and others carried off as slaves. The precise rendering of ver. 12 *b* is doubtful. Calvin, and, among the moderns, Hitzig, Ewald, Delitzsch, Cheyne, take it to mean "Thou didst not set their prices high." Others, such as Hupfeld, Baethgen, etc., adhere to the rendering, "Thou didst not increase [Thy wealth] by their price." The general sense is clear, and as bold as clear. It is almost sarcasm, directed against the Divine dealings: little has He gained by letting His

flock be devoured and scattered. Hupfeld attaches to the bitter saying a deep meaning: namely, that the "sale" did not take place "for the sake of profit or other external worldly ends, as is the case with men, but from higher disciplinary grounds of the Divine government—namely, simply as punishment for their sins, for their improvement." Rather it may indicate the dishonour accruing to the God, according to the ideas of the old world, when His votaries were defeated; or it may be the bitter reflection, "We can be of little worth in our Shepherd's eyes when He parts with us so easily." If there is any hint of tarnish adhering to the name of God by His people's defeat, the passage to the second main idea of this part is the easier.

Defeat brings dishonour. The nearer nations, such as Edomites, Ammonites, and other ancestral foes, are ready with their gibes. The more distant peoples make a proverb out of the tragedy, and nod their heads in triumph and scorn. The cowering creature, in the middle of this ring of mockers, is covered with shame as he hears the babel of heartless jests at his expense, and steals a glance at the fierce faces round him.

It is difficult to find historical facts corresponding with this picture. Even if the feature of selling into captivity is treated as metaphor, the rest of the picture needs some pressure to be made to fit the conditions of the Maccabean struggle, to which alone the subsequent avowals of faithfulness to God as the cause of calamity answer. For there were no such periods of disgraceful defeat and utter devastation when once that heroic revolt had begun. The third part of the psalm is in full accord with the religious consciousness of that Indian summer of national glories; but it must be acknowledged that the state of things described in

this second part does not fit quite smoothly into the hypothesis of a Maccabean date.

The third part (vv. 17–22) brings closely together professions of righteousness, which sound strangely in Christian ears, and complaints of suffering, and closes with the assertion that these two are cause and effect. The sufferers are a nation of martyrs, and know themselves to be so. This tone is remarkable when the nation is the speaker; for though we find individuals asserting innocence and complaining of undeserved afflictions in many psalms, a declaration of national conformity with the Law is in sharp contradiction both to history and to the uniform tone of prophets. This psalmist asserts not only national freedom from idolatry, but adherence in heart and act to the Covenant. No period before the exile was clear of the taint of idol worship and yet darkened by calamity. We have no record of any events before the persecutions that roused the Maccabean struggle which answer to the martyr cry of ver. 22: "For Thy sake we are killed all the day." It may, indeed, be questioned what is the relation in time of the two facts spoken of in vv. 17–19. Which comes first, the calamity or the steadfastness? Does the psalmist mean, "We are afflicted, and yet we are in affliction true to God," or "We were true to God, and yet are afflicted"? Probably the latter, as in the remainder of this part. "The place of jackals" is apparently the field of defeat referred to in the second part, where obscene creatures would gather to feast on the plundered corpses. The Christian consciousness cannot appropriate the psalmist's asseverations of innocence, and the difference between them and it should not be slurred over. But, on the other hand, his words should not be exaggerated into

charges of injustice against God, nor claims of absolute sinlessness. He does feel that present national distresses have not the same origin as past ones had had. There has been no such falling away as to account for them. But he does not arraign God's government. He knows why the miseries have come, and that he and his fellows are martyrs. He does not fling that fact down as an accusation of Providence, but as the foundation of a prayer and as a plea for God's help. The words may sound daring; still they are not blasphemy, but supplication.

The fourth part is importunate prayer. Its frank anthropomorphisms of a sleeping God, forgetting His people, surely need little defence. Sleep withdraws from knowledge of and action on the external world, and hence is attributed to God, when He allows evils to run unchecked. He is said to "awake," or, with another figure, to "arise," as if starting from His throned calm, when by some great act of judgment He smites flourishing evil into nothingness. Injustice is surely done to these cries of the *Ecclesia pressa* when they are supposed to be in opposition to the other psalmist's word: "He that keepeth Israel slumbers not, nor sleeps." Some commentators call these closing petitions commonplace; and so they are. Extreme need and agony of supplication have other things to think of than originality, and so long as sorrows are so commonplace and like each other, the cries of the sorrowful will be very much alike. God is pleased with well-worn prayers, which have fitted many lips, and is not so fastidious as some critics.

PSALM XLV.

1 My heart seethes [with] goodly speech:
I speak my work (poem) to a king:
My tongue is the pen of a swift scribe.

2 Thou art fair beyond the sons of men;
Grace is poured on thy lips:
Therefore God has blessed thee for ever.
3 Gird thy sword on thy thigh, O hero,
Thy splendour and thy majesty.
4 [And [in] thy majesty] press forward, ride on,
For the help of truth, and meekness-righteousness:
And thy right hand shall teach thee awe-striking deeds.
5 Thine arrows are keen—
The peoples fall under thee—
Into the heart of the enemies of the king.
6 Thy throne, O God, is for ever and aye:
7 A sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.
Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest iniquity:
Therefore God, thy God, has anointed thee
With the oil of gladness above thy fellows.
8 Myrrh and aloes [and] cassia [are] all thy robes;
Out of palaces of ivory, stringed instruments make thee glad.
9 Kings' daughters are among thy favourites:
The consort stands at thy right hand in Ophir gold.

10 Hearken, O daughter, and behold, and incline thine ear;
And forget thy people, and thy father's house;
11 So shall the king desire thy beauty:
For he is thy lord; and bow thou down to him.
12 And the daughter of Tyre [shall come] with a gift;
The richest among the peoples shall seek thy favour.
13 All glorious is the king's daughter in the inner palace:
Of cloth of gold is her garment.

14 In embroidered robes is she led to the king:
Maidens behind her, her friends, are brought to thee.
15 They are brought with gladness and exultation:
They enter into the palace of the king.

16 Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children:
Thou wilt make them princes in all the earth.
17 I will commemorate thy name through generation after generation:
Therefore shall the peoples praise thee for ever and aye.

THIS is an epithalamion or ode on a king's marriage. The usual bewildering variety of conjectures as to his identity meets us in commentaries. The older opinion points to Solomon's marriage to an Egyptian princess, to which it is objected that he was not a warrior king, as the monarch of the psalm is. Hitzig regards "daughter of Tyre," in ver. 12, as a vocative, and therefore looks for a king who married a Tyrian woman. He is obliged to go to the northern kingdom to find one, and pitches on Ahab, because Jezebel was the daughter of "a king of the Zidonians," and Ahab had an "ivory house" (1 Kings xxii. 39). It is hard to believe that that wedded pair of evil memory are the originals of the lovely portraits in the psalm, or that a psalmist would recognise the kingdom of Israel as divinely established and to be eternally upheld. Besides, the construction of ver. 12, on which this theory pivots, is doubtful, and the daughter of Tyre there mentioned is more probably one of the bringers of gifts to the bride. The attributes of the king and the promises for his descendants cannot be extended, without incongruity, beyond the Davidic line. Hence Delitzsch has selected Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, principally because his wife, Athaliah, was of Tyrian descent, being Jezebel's daughter, and partly because his father had been a trader, which accounts for the allusions to gold of Ophir and ivory.

These are slender grounds of identification, to say nothing of the miserable contrast which Jehoram's reign—a dreary record of apostasy and defeat, culminating in a tragic death and a dishonoured grave (2 Chron. xxi.)—would present to the psalm. Some commentators have thought of the marriage of a Persian king, mainly because the peculiar word for *consort* in ver. 9 is employed for Persian queens (Neh. ii. 6), and also because the Tyrians were tributary to Persia, and because the sons of the king are to be "called princes in all lands," which reminds us of Persian satraps. Ewald finally fixed on Jeroboam II. of Israel. Cheyne ("Orig. of Psalt.") finds the king of the psalm in Ptolemy Philadelphus, the inspirer, as was believed, of the LXX. translation, whom Josephus and Philo extol. Its author puts this identification only as "tentative." Notwithstanding his anticipatory protest against making Philadelphus' moral character an objection, he feels that it is an objection; for he urges that its darker shades had not yet disclosed themselves, and confesses that "a haze of illusion encompassed our poet," who "overrated this Ptolemy, from taking too external a view of the Messianic promise, and being flattered by a Hellenic king's partiality for his people" (*u.s.*, 172). Philadelphus afterwards married his sister His hands were red with blood. Was a Jewish psalmist likely to take "up the singing robes of a court poet" (*u.s.*) in honour of a Ptolemy, or to transfer the promises to the Davidic line to, and to speak of God as the God of a foreign king? Or how, if he did, came his song to find and keep a place in the Psalter? All these conjectures show the hopelessness of identifying the person intended addressed in the psalm. It is said that a knowledge of the historical allusions in the

Psalter is indispensable to enjoying it. They would often be helpful if they could be settled, but that is no reason for elevating conjecture to the place of knowledge.

One reason for the failure of attempts at identification is that the language is a world too wide for the best and greatest of Jewish kings. Much in the psalm applies to a historical occasion, the marriage of some monarch; but there is much that as obviously goes beyond it. Either, then, the psalm is hyperbole, outstripping even poetical licence, or there appear in it characteristics of the ideal monarch whom the psalmist knew to be promised to Israel. Every king of Judah by descent and office was a living prophecy. The singer sees the Messiah shining, as it were, through the shadowy form of the earthly king, whose limitations and defects, no less than his excellences and glories, pointed onwards to a greater than Solomon, in whom the "sure mercies" promised to David should be facts at last.

The psalm has two main divisions, prefaced by a prelude (ver. 1), and followed by prediction of happy issue of the marriage and enduring and wide dominion. The two main parts are respectively addressed to the royal bridegroom (vv. 2–9) and to the bride (vv. 10–15).

The singer lays claim to at least *poetic* inspiration. His heart is seething or boiling over with goodly words, or perhaps with the joyful matter which occasions his song—namely, the royal nuptials. He dedicates his "work" (like the original meaning of "poem"—a thing made) to "a king," the absence of the definite article suggesting that the office is more prominent than the person. He sings to a king; therefore his strains must be lofty. So full is his heart that the swift words pour out as the stylus of a rapid

writer races over the parchment. The previous musing has been long, the fire has burned slowly; but at last all is molten, and rushes out, fluent because fervent.

The picture of the king begins with two features on which the old-world ideal of a monarch laid stress—personal beauty and gracious speech. This monarch is fairer than the sons of men. The note of superhuman excellence is struck at the outset; and though the surface reference is only to physical beauty, that is conceived of as the indication of a fair nature which moulds the fair form.

> "For of the soul the body form doth take;
> For soul is form, and doth the body make."

The highest truth of this opening word is realised only in Him of whom it was also said, in apparent contradiction, but real harmony with it, "His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men." The craving for "whatsoever things are lovely," like all other desires, has for its object Jesus Christ. Another kingly excellence is sweet courtesy of speech. Possibly, indeed, the "grace poured on the lips" may mean the gracious smile which moulds their curves, but more likely it refers to the kindly speech that so well become a mouth that can command. The sweetest examples of such words are poor beside "the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth." The psalmist's ideal is that of a gentle king. Where else than in the King whose sceptre was a reed, not an iron rod, has it been fulfilled?

> "Nor know we anything more fair
> Than is the smile upon Thy face."

From such characteristics the psalmist draws an inference—"therefore God hath blessed thee for ever";

for that "therefore" does not introduce the result of the preceding excellences, but the cause of them. The psalmist knows that God has blessed the king because he sees these beauties. They are the visible signs and tokens of the Divine benediction. In its reference to Christ, the thought expressed is that His superhuman beauty is to all men the proof of a unique operation of God. Abiding divinity is witnessed by perfect humanity.

The scene changes with startling suddenness to the fury of battle. In a burst of lyric enthusiasm, forgetting for a moment nuptials and wedding marches, the singer calls on the king to array himself for war and to rush on the foe. Very striking is this combination of gentleness and warrior strength—a union which has been often realised in heroic figures, which is needful for the highest type of either, and which is fulfilled in the Lamb of God, who is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The king is to gird on his sword, and to array himself, as in glittering armour, in his splendour and majesty, and, thus arrayed, to mount his chariot, or, less probably, to bestride his war-horse, and hurl himself on the yielding ranks of the enemy. "Press forward, drive (or *ride*) on," crushing obstacles and forcing a path. But Israel's king could be no vulgar conqueror, impelled by lust of dominion or "glory." His sword is to be girt on for the help or "on behalf of truth, meekness, and righteousness." These abstracts may be used for concretes—namely, the possessors of the qualities named. But the limitation is not necessary. The monarch's warfare is for the spread of these. The Hebrew binds the two latter closely together by an anomalous construction, which may be represented by connecting the two words with a hyphen. They are

regarded as a double star. Then follows a verse of hurry: "Thy right hand shall teach thee awe-striking deeds." He has no allies. The canvas has no room for soldiers. The picture is like the Assyrian sculptures, in which the king stands erect and alone in his chariot, a giant in comparison with the tiny figures beneath him. Like Rameses in Pentaur's great battle-song, "he pierced the line of the foe; . . . he was all alone, no other with him." Then follow three abrupt clauses, reflecting in their fragmentary character the stress of battle: "Thine arrows are sharp—The peoples fall under thee—In the heart of the enemies of the king." The bright arrow is on the string; it whizzes; the plain is strewed with prostrate forms, the king's shaft in the heart of each. It is no mere fanciful spiritualising which sees in this picture an adumbration of the merciful warfare of Christ all through the ages. We get to the kernel of the history of Israel when we regard it as the preparation for Christ. We understand the *raison d'être* of its monarchy when we see in these poor shadows the types of the King of men, who was to be all that they should have been and were not. The world-wide conflict for truth and meekness and righteousness is His conflict, and the help which is done on earth He doeth it all Himself. The psalm waits for its completion still, and will wait until the day when the marriage supper of the Lamb is preceded by the last battle and crowning victory of Him who "in righteousness doth judge and make war."

All the older versions take "God," in ver. 6 *a*, as a vocative, while most moderns seek another construction or text. "The sum of the matter is that the only natural rendering of the received text is that of the Versions, 'Thy throne, O God'" (Cheyne, *in loc.*).

Three renderings have been proposed, all of which are harsh. "Thy throne is the throne of God," etc., is Ewald's suggestion, revived from a Jewish expositor, and adopted widely by many recent commentators, and in the margin of the R.V. It is clumsy, and leaves it doubtful whether the stress of the assertion lies on the Divine appointment or on the eternal duration of the throne. "Thy God's throne is," etc., is very questionable grammatically, and extremely harsh. The only other suggested rendering, "Thy throne is God," etc., may fairly be pronounced impossible. If the vocative construction is retained, are we shut up to Cheyne's further opinion, that "the only natural interpretation [is] that of the Targum, 'Thy throne, O Jehovah'"? If so, we shall be obliged to admit textual corruption; for a reference to the eternal duration of Jehovah's dominion is quite out of place here, where the parallelism of the next clause demands some characteristic of the king's throne corresponding to that of his sceptre, there stated. But in Exod. xxi. 6, xxii. 8, and Psalm lxxxii. 6, the name God (Elohim) is applied to rulers and judges, on the ground, as our Lord puts it, in John x. 35, that "unto them the word of God came"—*i.e.*, that they were theocratic officers. The designation, therefore, of the king as Elohim is not contrary to the Hebrew line of thought. It does not predicate divinity, but Divine preparation for and appointment to office. The recurrence of Elohim (God) in its full Divine signification in the next verse is felt by many to be an insuperable objection to recognising the lower sense here. But the emphatic "thy God," which is appended to the name in ver. 7, seems expressly intended to distinguish between the uses of the word in the two verses. August, then, as the title is, it proves nothing

as to the divinity of the person addressed. We recognise the prophetic character of the psalm, and strongly believe that it points onwards to Christ the King. But we cannot take the ascription of the title "O God" as having reference to His Divine nature. Such a thought lay far beyond the prophetic horizon. The Old Testament usage, which is appealed to in order to justify the translation of the word "God" as a vocative, must govern its meaning. The careful distinction drawn by the expressions of ver. 7, between the lower and higher senses of the name, forbid the attempt to find here a premature and anomalous statement of deep truth, for which the ages were not ripe. While we, who know the full truth, may permissibly apply the psalmist's words as its expression, we must not forget that in so doing we are going beyond their real meaning. The controversies waged over the construction of this verse have sometimes been embittered by the supposition that it was a buttress for the truth of Christ's Divine nature. But that is a mistake. The psalm goes no further than to declare that the king is divinely endowed and appointed. It does outline a character fairer than the sons of men, which requires indwelling Deity for its realisation in humanity But it does not speak the decisive word, which alone could solve the mystery of its requirement, by proclaiming the fact of incarnation.

The perpetuity of the king's throne is guaranteed, not only by his theocratic appointment by God, but by the righteousness of his rule. His sceptre is not a rod of iron, but "a sceptre of uprightness." He is righteous in character as well as in official acts. He "loves righteousness," and therefore cannot but "hate iniquity." His broad shield shelters all who love and

seek after righteousness, and he wars against evil wherever it shows itself. Therefore his throne stands firm, and is the world's hope. A singer who had grasped the truth that power divorced from justice could not endure was far in advance of his time. The nations have not yet learned his lesson. The vast robber-kingdoms which seemed to give the lie to his faith have confirmed it by their evanescence.

The king's love of righteousness leads to his being "anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows." This anointing is not that of a coronation, but that of a feast. His "fellows" may either be other kings or his attendant companions at his marriage. The psalmist looks as deep into individual life as he has just done into politics, and ascribes to righteousness lofty powers in that region too. The heart which loves it will be joyful, whatever befalls. Conformity to the highest ideal known to a man, or, at all events, hearty love thereof, leading to efforts after it, is the surest foundation for lasting and deep joy. Since Christ is the fulfilment of the psalmist's picture, and perfectly realised the perfection of manhood, the psalmist's words here are most fully applicable to Him.

True, He was "a man of sorrows," but beneath His sorrow had abiding and central joy, which He bequeathed to us, with the assurance that to possess it would make our joy full. His pure manhood was ever in touch with God, and lived in conscious righteousness, and therefore there was ever light within, though there was darkness around. He, the saddest, was likewise the gladdest of men, and "anointed with the oil of joy above His fellows."

In ver. 8 the psalm reaches its main theme—the

marriage of the king. The previous verses have painted his grace of person, his heroic deeds in battle, and his righteous rule. Now he stands ready to pass into the palace to meet his bride. His festival robes are so redolent of perfumes that they seem to be composed of nothing but woven fragrance. There are difficulties in the rendering of ver. 8 *a*, but that adopted above is generally accepted as the most probable. The clause then describes the burst of jubilant music which welcomed and rejoiced the king as he approached the "palaces of ivory," where his bride waited his coming.

Ver. 9 carries the king into his harem. The inferior wives are of royal blood, but nearest him and superior to these is the queen-consort glittering with golden ornaments. This feature of the psalmist's description can only have reference to the actual historical occasion of the psalm, and warns against overlooking that in seeking a prophetic reference to the Christ in every particular.

The second half of the psalm is an address to the bride and a description of her beauty and state. The singer assumes a fatherly tone, speaking to her as "daughter." She is a foreigner by birth, and is called upon to give up all her former associations, with whole-hearted consecration to her new duties. It is difficult to imagine Jezebel or Athaliah as the recipient of these counsels, nor does it seem to the present writer to add anything to the enjoyment of the psalm that the person to whom they were addressed should be identified. The exhortation to give up all for love's sake goes to the heart of the sacred relation of husband and wife, and witnesses to the lofty ideal of that relation which prevailed in Israel, even though

polygamy was not forbidden. The sweet necessity of wedded love subordinates all other love, as a deeper well, when sunk, draws the surface waters and shallower springs into itself.

> "The rich, golden shaft
> Hath killed the flock of all affections else
> That live in her."

The king sung of in the psalm was a type of Christ. Every true marriage is in the same fashion a type of the union of the soul with Jesus, the lover of all, the bridegroom of humanity. So it is not arbitrary spiritualising, but recognition of the nobleness of the lower love and of its essential similarity with the highest, when the counsel to this bride is regarded as shadowing the duties of the soul wedded to Christ. If a heart is really influenced by love to Him, that love will make self-surrender blessed. A child gladly drops toys when it stretches out its little hand for better gifts. If we are joined to Jesus, we shall not be unwilling to "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge" of Him. Have the terms of wedded life changed since this psalm was written? Have the terms of Christian living altered since it was said, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple"? The law still remains, "Daughter, forget thine own people and Thy father's house." The exhortation is followed by a promise: "So shall the king desire thy beauty." The application of these words to the relations of Christ and His people carries with it a striking thought that He is affected by the completeness of our self-surrender and dependence. He pours love on the unworthy, but that is a different

thing from the love with which He responds to such abandonment of self and other loves. Holy, noble living will bring a smile into His face and draw Him nearer to us.

But whilst there is all this sweet commerce of love and giving, the bride is reminded that the king is her lord, and is to be reverenced as well as loved. There is here, no doubt, the influence of an archaic mode of regarding marriage and the wife's position. But it still is true that no woman finds all that her heart needs in her husband, unless she can bring her reverence where she has brought her love; and that love will not long remain if reverence departs. Nor is the warning less needed in the higher region of the wedlock of the soul with the Saviour. Some types of emotional religion have more to say about love than about obedience. They are full of half-wholesome apostrophes to a "dear Lord," and are apt to forget the last word in the emphasis which they put on the first. The beggar-maid married to a king was full of reverence as well as love; and the souls whom Jesus stoops to love and wash and wed are never to forget to blend adoration with approach and obedience with love.

A picture of the reflected honour and influence of the bride follows in ver. 12. When she stands by the king's side, those around recognise her dignity, and seek to secure her favour. Hupfeld, Hitzig, and others take "daughter of Tyre" to be a vocative, addressed to the bride, who is, according to their view, a Tyrian princess. But there is a strong grammatical objection to that construction in the copula ("and") prefixed to "daughter," which is never so prefixed to a vocative unless preceded by another vocative. Delitzsch, Baethgen, Perowne, and Cheyne agree in recognising the

force of that consideration, and the three former regard the phrase not as a vocative, but as a nominative. It is a personification of the Tyrians according to a familiar idiom. The clause is elliptical, and has to be supplemented by supposing that the same verb, which appears in the next clause in the plural, is to be supplied in thought, just as that clause requires the supplement of "with a gift" from this one. There appears to be some flaw in the text, as the clauses are unsymmetrical, and possibly the punctuators have marked a hiatus by the sign (Pasek) after the word "daughter of Tyre." To "seek thy favour" is literally to "smooth thy face"—a graphic representation. In the highest region, which we regard the psalm as adumbrating, the words have fulfilment. The bride standing by her bridegroom, and showing her love and devotion by self-abandonment and reverence, will be glorious in the eyes of those around. They who manifestly live in loving communion with their Lord will be recognised for what they are, and, though sometimes hated therefor, will also be honoured. When the Church has cast all but Christ out of its heart, it will conquer the world. "The sons of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee."

In vv. 13–15 the bride's apparel and nuptial procession are described. She is "all glorious within,"—by which is not meant, as ordinarily supposed, that she possesses an inner beauty of soul, but that the poet conceives of her as standing in the inner chamber, where she has been arrayed in her splendour. Krochmal, followed by Graetz and Cheyne, changes the text so as to read *corals*, or, as Cheyne renders, *pearls* (Heb. *p'ninim*), for *within* (*p'ninah*), and thus preserves unity of subject in the verse by removing the local designa-

tion. But the existing reading is intelligible. In ver. 14 the marriage procession is described. The words rendered "embroidered robes" are by some taken to mean "tapestry of divers colours" (Perowne), or richly woven carpets spread for the bride to walk on, and by others (Hitzig, Riehm) gay-coloured cushions, to which she is led in order to sit beside the bridegroom. But the word means apparel elsewhere, and either of the other meanings introduces an irrelevant detail of another kind into the picture. The analogy of other Scripture metaphors leads at once to interpreting the bride's attire as symbolic of the purity of character belonging to the Church. The Apocalypse dresses "the Lamb's wife" in "fine linen, clean and white." The psalm arrays her in garments gleaming with gold, which symbolise splendour and glory, and in embroidered robes, which suggest the patient use of the slow needle, and the variegated harmony of colour attained at last. There is no marriage between Christ and the soul, unless it is robed in the beauty of righteousness and manifold graces of character. In other places we read that the bride "made *herself* ready," and also that "to her was *granted* that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white," in which sayings are set forth the double sources of such a garment of the soul. It is a gift from above. It is "put on" by continual effort, based on faith. The picture of the home-coming of the bride follows. She is attended by her maidens, and with them she passes into the palace amid joys and exultation. The psalm stops at the threshold. It is not for the singer to draw back the curtains and let in the day. "The door was shut." The presence of virgin companions waiting on the bride no more interferes with the application of the psalm to Christ and

His Church than the similar representation brings confusion into our Lord's parable of the Ten Virgins. Parables and symbols are elastic, and often duplicate their representations of the same thing; and such is the case here.

The closing verses are addressed, not to the bride, but to the king, and can only in a very modified way and partially be supposed to pass beyond the Jewish monarch and refer to the true King. Hopes that he might be blessed with fortunate issue of the marriage were quite in place in an epithalamion, and the delicacy of the light touch with which this closing note is struck is noteworthy, especially in contrast with the tone of many famous secular songs of similar import. But much straining is needed to extract a spiritual sense from the words. Perowne truly says that it is "wiser to acknowledge at once the mixed character" of the psalm, and he quotes a sagacious saying of Calvin's to the effect that it is not necessary that every detail should be carefully fitted to Christ. The psalm had a historical basis; and it has also a prophetic meaning, because the king of Israel was himself a type, and Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the ideal never realised by its successive occupants. Both views of its nature must be kept in view in its interpretation; and it need cause no surprise if, at some points, the rind of prose fact is, so to speak, thicker than at others, or if certain features absolutely refuse to lend themselves to the spiritual interpretation.

PSALM XLVI.

1 God is a refuge and stronghold for us,
A help in troubles most readily to be found.
2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth do change,
And the mountains reel into the heart of the sea.
3 Let its waters roar and foam;
Let mountains shake at its pride. Selah.
[Jehovah of hosts is with us;
A high tower for us is Jacob's God.]

4 [There is] a river—its branches make glad the city of God
The sanctuary of the tabernacles of the Most High.
5 God is in her midst; she shall not be moved:
God shall help her at the morning dawn.
6 Nations roared, kingdoms were moved:
He gave forth His voice, the earth melts.
7 Jehovah of hosts is with us;
A high tower for us is Jacob's God. Selah.

8 Come, behold the deeds of Jehovah,
Who has made desolations in the earth.
9 Quelling wars to the end of the earth:
The bow He breaks, and hews the spear in splinters;
The chariots He burns in the fire.
10 "Desist, and know that I am God:
I will be exalted in the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."
11 Jehovah of hosts is with us;
A high tower for us is Jacob's God. Selah.

THERE are two events, one or other of which probably supplies the historical basis of this and the two following psalms. One is Jehoshaphat's deliverance from the combined forces of the bordering nations (2 Chron. xx.). Delitzsch adopts this as the occasion of the psalm. But the other more usually

accepted reference to the destruction of Sennacherib's army is more probable. Psalms xlvi. and xlviii. have remarkable parallelisms with Isaiah. The noble contrast of the quiet river which makes glad the city of God with a tossing, earth-shaking sea resembles the prophet's threatening that the effect of refusing the "waters of Shiloah which go softly" would be inundation by the strong and mighty river, the Assyrian power. And the emblem is expanded in the striking language of Isa. xxxiii. 21: "The glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars." Encircled by the flashing links of that broad moat, Jerusalem sits secure. Again, the central thought of the refrain in the psalm, "The Lord of hosts is with us," is closely allied to the symbolic name which Isaiah gave as a pledge of deliverance, "Immanuel, God with us."

The structure is simple. The three strophes into which the psalm falls set forth substantially the same thought, that God's presence is safety and peace, whatever storms may roar. This general theme is exhibited in the first strophe (vv. 1–3) in reference to natural convulsions; in the second (vv. 4–7) in reference to the rage of hostile kingdoms; and in the third (vv. 8–11) men are summoned to behold a recent example of God's delivering might, which establishes the truth of the preceding utterances and has occasioned the psalm. The grand refrain which closes the second and third strophes should probably be restored at the end of ver. 3.

In the first strophe the psalmist paints chaos come again, by the familiar figures of a changed earth, tottering mountains sinking in the raging sea from which they rose at creation, and a wild ocean with

thunderous dash appalling the ear and yeasty foam terrifying the eye, sweeping in triumphant insolence over all the fair earth. It is prosaic to insist on an allegorical meaning for the picture. It is rather a vivid sketch of utter confusion, dashed in with three or four bold strokes, an impossible case supposed in order to bring out the unshaken calm of those who have God for ark in such a deluge. He is not only a sure refuge and stronghold, but one easy of access when troubles come. There is little good in a fortress, however impregnable, if it is so difficult to reach that a fugitive might be slain a hundred times before he was safe in it. But this high tower, which no foe can scale, can be climbed at a thought, and a wish lifts us within its mighty walls. The psalmist speaks a deep truth, verified in the spiritual life of all ages, when he celebrates the refuge of the devout soul as "most readily to be found."

As the text stands, this strophe is a verse too short, and ver. 3 drags if connected with "will not we fear." The restoration of the refrain removes the anomaly in the length of the strophe, and enables us to detach ver. 3 from the preceding. Its sense is then completed, if we regard it as the protasis of a sentence of which the refrain is the apodosis, or if, with Cheyne and others, we take ver. 3, "Let its waters roar," etc.—what of that? "Jehovah of hosts is with us." If the strophe is thus completed, it conforms to the other two, in each of which may be traced a division into two pairs of verses. These two verse-pairs of the first strophe would then be inverted parallelism,—the former putting security in God first, and surrounding trouble second; the latter dealing with the same two subjects, but in reversed sequence.

The second strophe brings a new picture to view with impressive suddenness, which is even more vividly dramatic if the refrain is not supplied. Right against the vision of confusion comes one of peace. The abrupt introduction of "a river" as an isolated noun, which dislocates grammatical structure, is almost an exclamation. "There is a river" enfeebles the swing of the original. We might almost translate, "Lo! a river!" Jerusalem was unique among historical cities in that it had no great river. It had one tiny thread of water, of which perhaps the psalmist is thinking. But whether there is here the same contrast between Siloam's gentle flow and the surging waters of hostile powers as Isaiah sets forth in the passage already referred to (Isa. viii. 6), the meaning of this gladdening stream is the ever-flowing communication of God Himself in His grace. The stream is the fountain in flow. In the former strophe we hear the roar of the troubled waters, and see the firm hills toppling into their depths. Now we behold the gentle flow of the river, gliding through the city, with music in its ripples and sunshine in its flash and refreshment in its waters, parting into many arms and yet one in diversity, and bringing life and gladness wherever it comes. Not with noise nor tumult, but in silent communication, God's grace and peace refresh the soul. Power is loud, but Omnipotence is silent. The roar of all the billows is weak when compared with the quiet sliding onwards of that still stream. It has its divisions. As in old days each man's bit of garden was irrigated by a branch led from the stream, so in endless diversity, corresponding to the infinite greatness of the source and the innumerable variety of men's needs, God's grace comes. "All these worketh that one and

the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally." The streams gladden the city of God with the gladness of satisfied thirsts, with the gladness which comes from the contact of the human spirit with Divine completeness. So supplied, the city may laugh at besiegers. It has unfailing supplies within itself, and the enemy may cut off all surface streams, but its "water shall be sure."

Substantially the same thought is next stated in plain words: "God is in the midst of her." And therefore two things follow. One is unshaken stability, and another is help at the right time—"at the turn of the morning." "The Lord is in the midst of her"—that is a perennial fact. "The Lord shall help her"—that is the "grace for seasonable help." He, not we, determines when the night shall thin away its blackness into morning twilight. But we may be sure that the presence which is the pledge of stability and calm even in storm and darkness will flash into energy of help at the moment when He wills. The same expression is used to mark the time of His looking from the pillar of cloud and troubling the Egyptians, and there may be an allusion to that standing instance of His help here. "It is not for you to know the times and the seasons"; but this we may know—that the Lord of all times will always help at the right time; He will not come so quickly as to anticipate our consciousness of need, nor delay so long as to let us be irrevocably engulfed in the bog. "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When He heard *therefore* that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was." Yet He came in time.

With what vigour the short, crashing clauses of ver. 6 describe the wrath and turbulence of the nations, and

the instantaneous dissolving of their strength into weakness at a word from those awful lips! The verse may be taken as hypothetical or as historical. In either case we see the sequence of events as by a succession of lightning flashes. The hurry of the style, marked by the omission of connecting particles, reflects the swiftness of incident, like *Veni, vidi, vici.* The utterance of God's will conquers all. At the sound of that voice stillness and a pause of dread fall on the "roar" (same word as in ver. 3) of the nations, like the hush in the woods when thunder rolls. He speaks, and all meaner sounds cease. "The lion hath roared, who shall not fear?" No material vehicle is needed. To every believer in God there is an incomprehensible action of the Divine Will on material things; and no explanations bridge the gulf recognised in the psalmist's broken utterances, which declare sequence and not mode of operation: "He uttered His voice, the earth melted."

Again the triumph of the refrain peals forth, with its musical accompaniment prolonging the impression. In it the psalmist gives voice, for himself and his fellows, to their making their own of the general truths which the psalm has been declaring. The two names of God set forth a twofold ground for confidence. "Jehovah of hosts" is all the more emphatic here since the Second Book of the Psalter is usually Elohistic. It proclaims God's eternal, self-existent Being, and His covenant relation, as well as His absolute authority over the ranked forces of the universe, personal or impersonal, spiritual or material. The Lord of all these legions is with us. When we say "The God of Jacob," we reach back into the past and lay hold of the Helper of the men of old as ours. What He has been, He is; what He did, He is doing still. The river is full to-day,

though the van of the army did long ago drink and were satisfied. The bright waters are still as pellucid and abundant as then, and the last of the rear-guard will find them the same.

The third strophe summons to contemplate with fixed attention the "desolations" made by some great manifestation of God's delivering power. It is presupposed that these are still visible. Broken bows, splintered spears, half-charred chariots, strew the ground, and Israel can go forth without fear and feast their eyes on these tokens of what God has done for them. The language is naturally applied to the relics of Sennacherib's annihilated force. In any case it points to a recent act of God's, the glad surprise of which palpitates all through the psalm. The field of history is littered with broken, abandoned weapons, once flourished in hands long since turned to dust; and the city and throne of God against which they were lifted remain unharmed. The voice which melted the earth speaks at the close of the psalm; not now with destructive energy, but in warning, through which tones of tenderness can be caught. God desires that foes would cease their vain strife before it proves fatal. "Desist" is here an elliptical expression, of which the full form is "Let your hands drop"; or, as we say, "Ground your weapons," and learn how vain is a contest with Him who is God, and whose fixed purpose is that all nations shall know and exalt Him. The prospect hinted at in the last words, of a world submissive to its King, softens the terrors of His destructive manifestations, reveals their inmost purpose, and opens to foes the possibility of passing, not as conquerors, but as subjects, and therefore fellow-citizens, through the gate into the city.

PSALM XLVII.

1 All ye peoples, clap [your] hands;
Shout to God with joyful cry.
2 For Jehovah is most High [and] dread,
A great King over all the earth.
3 He subdues peoples under us,
And nations under our feet,
4 He chooses for us our inheritance,
The pride of Jacob whom He loved. Selah.

5 God is gone up with a shout,
Jehovah with trumpet clang.
6 Sing with the harp to God, sing with the harp:
Sing with the harp to our King, sing with the harp.
7 For King of all the earth is God:
Sing with the harp a skilful song.
8 God has become King over the nations:
He has taken His seat on His holy throne.

9 The princes of the peoples gather themselves together
[As] a people of the God of Abraham:
For to God belong the shields of the earth;
Greatly has He exalted Himself.

THE closing thought of Psalm xlvi. is nobly expanded in this jubilant summons to all nations to praise Jehovah as their King. Both psalms have a similar, and probably the same, historical basis: a Divine act so recent that the tumult of triumph has not yet subsided, and the waves of joy still run high. Only in Psalm xlvi. the effect of that God-wrought deliverance is principally regarded as the security and peace of Israel, and in this psalm as the drawing of the nations

to obey Israel's King, and so to join the chorus of Israel's praise. While the psalm has many resemblances to the Songs of the King (Psalm xciii. *seqq.*), it is clearly in its right place here, as forming with the preceding and succeeding psalms a trilogy, occasioned by one great manifestation of God's care for the nation. No event is more appropriate than the usually accepted destruction of Sennacherib's army. The psalm has little of complexity in structure or thought. It is a gush of pure rapture. It rises to prophetic foresight, and, by reason of a comparatively small historical occasion, has a vision of the world-wide expansion of the kingdom of God. It falls into two strophes of four verses each, with one longer verse appended to the latter.

In the first strophe the nations are invited to welcome God as their King, not only because of His Divine exaltation and world-wide dominion, but also because of His deeds for "Jacob." The same Divine act which in Psalm xlvi. is represented as quelling wars and melting the earth, and in Psalm xlviii. as bringing dismay, pain, and flight, is here contemplated as attracting the nations to worship. The psalmist knows that destructive providences have their gracious aspect, and that God's true victory over men is not won when opposition is crushed and hearts made to quake, but when recognition of His sway and joy in it swell the heart. The quick clatter of clapping hands in sign of homage to the King (2 Kings xi. 12) blends with the shrill cries with which Easterns express joy, in "a tumult of acclaim." Hupfeld thinks that to suppose the heathen called upon to do homage because of the victory for Israel won over them is entirely mistaken. But unless that victory is the reason for the summons,

the psalm offers none; and it is surely not difficult to suppose that the exhibition of God's power leads to reflection which issues in recognition of His sovereignty. Vv. 3, 4, seem to state the grounds for the summons in ver. 1. The tenses in these verses present a difficulty in the way of taking them for a historical retrospect of the conquest and partition of Canaan, which but for that objection would be the natural interpretation. It is possible to take them as "a truth of experience inferred from what had just been witnessed, the historical fact being expressed not in historical form, but generalised and idealised" (Delitzsch, *in loc.*). The just accomplished deliverance repeated in essence the wonders of the first entrance on possession of the land, and revealed the continuous working of the same Divine hand, ever renewing the choice of Jacob's inheritance and ever scattering its enemies. "The pride of Jacob" is a phrase in apposition with "our inheritance." The Holy Land was the object of "pride" to "Jacob," not in an evil sense but in that he boasted of it as a precious treasure intrusted to him by God. The root fact of all God's ancient and continued blessings is that He "loved." His own heart, not Jacob's deserts, prompted His mercies.

The second strophe is distinguished from the first by the increased fervour of its calls to praise, by its still more exultant rush, and by its omission of reference to Jacob. It is wholly concerned with the peoples whom it invites to take up the song. As in the former strophe the singer showed to the peoples God working in the world, here he bids them look up and see Him ascending on high. "Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first?" The mighty deliverance of which the triumph throbs through this

trilogy of pæans of victory was God's coming down. Now He has gone back to His throne and seated Himself thereon, not as having ceased to work in the world—for He is still King over it all—but as having completed a delivering work. He does not withdraw when He goes up. He does not cease to work here below when He sits throned in His palace-temple above. The "shout" and "voice of a trumpet," which accompany that ascent, are borrowed from the ordinary attendants on a triumphal procession. He soars as in a chariot of praises,—from whose lips the psalm does not say, but probably it intends Israel to be understood as the singer. To that choir the nations are called to join their voices and harps, since God is their King too, and not Jacob's only. The word rendered in the A.V. and R.V. (text) "with understanding" is a noun, the name of a description of psalm, which occurs in several psalm titles, and is best understood as "a skilful song." Ver. 8 gathers up the reasons for the peoples' homage to God. He has "become King" over them by His recent act, having manifested and established His dominion; and He has now "sat down on His throne," as having accomplished His purpose, and as thence administering the world's affairs.

A final verse, of double the length of the others, stands somewhat apart from the preceding strophe both in rhythm and in thought. It crowns the whole. The invitations to the nations are conceived of as having been welcomed and obeyed. And there rises before the poet's eye a fair picture of a great convocation, such as might wait before a world-ruling monarch's throne on the day of his coronation. The princes of the nations, like tributary kings, come flocking to do homage, "as if they surely knew their sovereign Lord was by."

The obliteration of distinction between Israel and the nations, by the incorporation of the latter, so that "the peoples" become part of the "people of the God of Abraham," floats before the singer's prophetic eye, as the end of God's great manifestation of Himself. The two parts of that double choir, which the preceding strophes summon to song, coalesce at last, and in grand unison send up one full-throated, universal melodious shout of praise. "The shields of the earth" are best understood as a figurative expression for the princes just spoken of, who now at last recognise to whom they belong. Thus God has exalted Himself by His deeds; and the result of these deeds is that He is greatly exalted by the praise of a world, in which Israel and the "peoples" dwell as one beneath His sceptre and celebrate His name.

The psalmist looked far ahead. His immediate experience was as "a little window through which he saw great matters." The prophecy of the universal spread of God's kingdom and the inclusion in it of the Gentiles is Messianic; and whether the singer knew that he spoke of a fair hope which should not be a fact for weary centuries, or anticipated wider and permanent results from that triumph which inspired his song, he spake of the Christ, and his strains are true prophecies of His dominion. There is no intentional reference in the psalm to the Ascension; but the thoughts underlying its picture of God's going up with a shout are the same which that Ascension sets forth as facts,—the merciful coming down into humanity of the Divine Helper; the completeness of His victory as attested by His return thither where He was before; His session in heaven, not as idle nor wearied, but as having done what He meant to do; His continuous working as King

in the world; and the widening recognition of His authority by loving hearts. The psalmist summons us all to swell with our voices that great chorus of praise which, like a sea, rolls and breaks in music round His royal seat.

PSALM XLVIII.

1 Great is Jehovah, and much to be praised,
In the city of our God, His holy mountain.
2 Lovely in loftiness, a joy of all the earth,
Is Mount Zion, the recesses of the north, the city of the great King.

3 God in her palaces
Has made Himself known as a high tower.
4 For, lo, the kings assembled themselves,
They marched onwards together.
5 They saw, then they were amazed;
They were terror-struck, they fled.
6 Trembling seized them there;
Pain, as [of] a woman in travail.
7 With an east wind
Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish.
8 According as we have heard, so have we seen
In the city of Jehovah of hosts, in the city of our God:
God will establish her for ever. Selah.

9 We have thought, O God, of Thy loving-kindness
In the midst of Thy Temple.
10 According to Thy name, O God,
So is Thy praise to the ends of the earth:
Thy right hand is full of righteousness.
11 Let Mount Zion rejoice,
Let the daughters of Judah exult,
Because of Thy judgments.
12 Compass Zion, and walk round her:
Reckon her towers.

13 Give heed to her bulwark,
Pass through her palaces;
That ye may tell it to the generation after.
14 That such is God, our God:
For ever and aye He will guide us.
Al-Muth.

THE situation seems the same as in Psalm xlvi., with which this psalm has many points of contact. In both we have the same triumph, the same proud affection for the holy city and sanctuary, the same confidence in God's dwelling there, the same vivid picturing of the mustering of enemies and their rapid dispersion, the same swift movement of style in describing that overthrow, the same thought of the diffusion of God's praise in the world as its consequence, the same closing summons to look upon the tokens of deliverance, with the difference that, in the former psalm, these are the shattered weapons of the defeated foe, and in this the unharmed battlements and palaces of the delivered city. The emphatic word of the refrain in Psalm xlvi. also reappears here in ver. 3. The psalm falls into three parts, of which the first (vv. 1, 2) is introductory, celebrating the glory of Zion as the city of God; the second (vv. 3–8) recounts in glowing words the deliverance of Zion; and the third tells of the consequent praise and trust of the inhabitants of Zion (vv. 9–14).

The general sense of the first part is plain, but ver. 2 is difficult. "Mount Zion" is obviously subject, and "lovely in loftiness" and "joy of all the earth" predicates; but the grammatical connection of the two last clauses is obscure. Further, the meaning of "the sides of the north" has not been satisfactorily ascertained. The supposition that there is an allusion in

the phrase to the mythological mountain of the gods, with which Zion is compared, is surely most unnatural. Would a Hebrew psalmist be likely to introduce such a parallel, even in order to assert the superiority of Zion? Nor is the grammatical objection to the supposition less serious. It requires a good deal of stretching and inserting to twist the two words "the sides of the north" into a comparison. It is more probable that the clause is topographical, describing some part of the city, but what part is far from clear. The accents make all the verse after "earth" the subject of the two preceding predicates, and place a minor division at "north," implying that "the sides of the north" is more closely connected with "Mount Zion" than with the "city of the great King," or than that last clause is.

Following these indications, Stier renders "Mount Zion [and] the northern side (*i.e.*, the lower city, on the north of Zion), which together make the city," etc. Others see here "the Holy City regarded from three points of view"—viz., "the Mount Zion" (the city of David), "the sides of the north" (Mount Moriah and the Temple), "the city of the great King" (Jerusalem proper). So Perowne and others. Delitzsch takes Zion to be the Temple hill, and "the sides of the north" to be in apposition. "The Temple hill, or Zion, in the narrower sense, actually formed the north-eastern corner of ancient Jerusalem," says he, and thus regards the subject of the whole sentence as really twofold, not threefold, as appears at first—Zion on the north, which is the palace-temple, and Jerusalem at its feet, which is "the city of the great King." But it must be admitted that no interpretation runs quite smoothly, though the summary ejection of the troublesome words "the sides of the north" from the text is too violent a remedy.

But the main thought of this first part is independent of such minute difficulties. It is that the one thing which made Zion-Jerusalem glorious was God's presence in it. It was beautiful in its elevation; it was safely isolated from invaders by precipitous ravines, inclosing the angle of the plateau on which it stood. But it was because God dwelt there and manifested Himself there that it was "a joy for all the earth." The name by which even the earthly Zion is called is "Jehovah-Shammah, The Lord is there." We are not forcing New Testament ideas into Old Testament words when we see in the psalm an eternal truth. An idea is one thing; the fact which more or less perfectly embodies it is another. The idea of God's dwelling with men had its less perfect embodiment in the presence of the Shechinah in the Temple, its more perfect in the dwelling of God in the Church, and will have its complete when the city "having the glory of God" shall appear, and He will dwell with men and be their God. God in her, not anything of her own, makes Zion lovely and gladdening. "Thy beauty was perfect through My comeliness which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord."

The second part pictures Zion's deliverance with picturesque vigour (vv. 3–8). Ver. 3 sums up the whole as the act of God, by which He has made Himself known as that which the refrain of Psalm xlvi. declared Him to be—a refuge, or, literally, a high tower. Then follows the muster of the hosts. "The kings were assembled." That phrase need not be called exaggeration, nor throw doubt on the reference to Sennacherib's army, if we remember the policy of Eastern conquerors in raising their armies from their conquests, and the boast which Isaiah puts into the

mouth of the Assyrian: "Are not my princes altogether kings?" They advance against the city. "They saw," —no need to say what. Immediately they "were amazed." The sight of the city broke on them from some hill-crest on their march. Basilisk-like, its beauty was paralysing, and shot a nameless awe into their hearts. "They were terror-struck; they fled." As in Psalm xlvi. 6, the clauses, piled up without cement of connecting particles, convey an impression of hurry, culminating in the rush of panic-struck fugitives. As has been often noticed, they recall Cæsar's *Veni, vidi, vici*; but these kings came, saw, *were* conquered. No cause for the rout is named. No weapons were drawn in the city. An unseen hand "smites once, and smites no more"; for once is enough. The process of deliverance is not told; for a hymn of victory is not a chronicle. One image explains it all, and signalises the Divine breath as the sole agent. "Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind" is not history, but metaphor. The unwieldy, huge vessel, however strong for fight, is unfit for storms, and, caught in a gale, rolls heavily in the trough of the sea, and is driven on a lee shore and ground to pieces on its rocks. "God blew upon them, and they were scattered," as the medal struck on the defeat of the Armada had it. In the companion psalm God's uttered voice did all. Here the breath of the tempest, which is the breath of His lips, is the sole agent.

The past, of which the nation had heard from its fathers, lives again in their own history; and that verification of traditional belief by experience is to a devout soul the chief blessing of its deliverances. There is rapture in the thought that "As we have heard, so have we seen." The present ever seems

commonplace. The sky is farthest from earth right overhead, but touches the ground on the horizon behind and before. Miracles were in the past; God will be manifestly in the far-off future, but the present is apt to seem empty of Him. But if we rightly mark His dealings with us, we shall learn that nothing in His past has so passed that it is not present. As the companion psalm says, "The God of Jacob is *our* refuge," this exclaims, "As we have heard, so have we seen."

But not only does the deliverance link the present with the past, but it flings a steady light into the future. "God shall establish her for ever." The city is truly "the eternal city," because God dwells in it. The psalmist was thinking of the duration of the actual Jerusalem, the imperfect embodiment of a great idea. But whatever may be its fate, the heart of his confidence is no false vision; for God's city will outlast the world. Like the "maiden fortresses," of which there is one in almost every land, fondly believed never to have been taken by enemies, that city is inexpugnable, and the confident answer to every threatening assailant is, "The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee." "God will establish her for ever." The pledges of that stability are the deliverances of the past and present.

The third part (vv. 9–14) deals with the praise and trust of the inhabitants of Zion. Deliverance leads to thankful meditation on the loving-kindness which it so signally displayed, and the ransomed people first gather in the Temple, which was the scene of God's manifestation of His grace, and therefore is the fitting place for them to ponder it. The world-wide consequences of the

great act of loving-kindness almost shut out of sight for the moment its bearing on the worshippers. It is a lofty height to which the song climbs, when it regards national deliverance chiefly as an occasion for wider diffusion of God's praise. His "name" is the manifestation of His character in act. The psalmist is sure that wherever that character is declared praise will follow, because he is sure that that character is perfectly and purely good, and that God cannot act but in such a way as to magnify Himself. That great sea will cast up nothing but pearls. The words carry also a lesson for recipients of Divine loving-kindness, teaching them that they misapprehend the purpose of their blessings, if they confine these to their own well-being and lose sight of the higher object—that men may learn to know and love Him. But the deliverance not only produces grateful meditation and widespread praise; it sets the mother city and her daughter villages astir, like Miriam and her maidens, with timbrel and dance, and ringing songs which celebrate "Thy judgments," terrible as they were. That dead host was an awful sight, and hymns of praise seem heartless for its dirge. But it is not savage glee nor fierce hatred which underlies the psalmist's summons, and still less is it selfish joy. "Thy judgments" are to be hymned when they smite some giant evil; and when systems and their upholders that array themselves against God are drowned in some Red Sea, it is fitting that on its banks should echo, "Sing ye to Jehovah, for He hath triumphed gloriously."

The close of this part may be slightly separated from vv. 9–11. The citizens who have been cooped up by the siege are bidden to come forth, and, free from fear, to compass the city without, and pass between its palaces within, and so see how untouched they are.

The towers and bulwark or rampart remain unharmed, with not a stone smitten from its place. Within, the palaces stand without a trace of damage to their beauty. Whatever perishes in any assaults, that which is of God will abide; and, after all musterings of the enemy, the uncaptured walls will rise in undiminished strength, and the fair palaces which they guard glitter in untarnished splendour. And this complete exemption from harm is to be told to the generation following, that they may learn what a God this God is, and how safely and well He will guide all generations.

The last word in the Hebrew text, which the A.V. and R.V. render "even unto death," can scarcely have that meaning. Many attempts have been made to find a signification appropriate to the close of such a triumphal hymn as this, but the simplest and most probable course is to regard the words as a musical note, which is either attached abnormally to the close of the psalm, or has strayed hither from the superscription of Psalm xlix. It is found in the superscription of Psalm ix. ("Al-Muth") as a musical direction, and has in all likelihood the same meaning here. If it is removed, the psalm ends abruptly, but a slight transposition of words and change of the main division of the verse remove that difficulty by bringing "for ever and aye" from the first half. The change improves both halves, laying the stress of the first exclusively on the thought that this God is such a God (or, by another rendering, "is here," *i.e.*, in the city), without bringing in reference to the eternity of His protection, and completing the second half worthily, with the thought of His eternal guidance of the people among whom He dwells.

PSALM XLIX.

1 Hear this, all ye peoples;
Give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world:
2 Both low-born and high-born,
Rich and poor together.
3 My mouth shall speak wisdom;
And the meditation of my heart shall utter understanding
4 I will bend my ear to a parable:
I will open my riddle on the harp.

5 Why should I fear in the days of evil,
When the malice of my pursuers surrounds me,
6 [Even of] those who rely on their riches,
And boast of their wealth?
7 No man can at all redeem a brother;
He cannot give to God a ransom for him
8 (Yea, too costly is the redemption price of their soul,
And he must leave it alone for ever):
9 That he may continue living on for ever,
And may not see the pit.
10 Nay, he must see that the wise die,
The fool and the brutish perish alike,
And leave to others their riches.
11 Their inward thought [is that] their houses [shall last] for ever,
Their dwellings to generation after generation;
They call their lands by their own names.
12 But man [being] in honour abides not:
He becomes like the beasts [that] are brought to silence.

13 This is the lot of them to whom presumptuous confidence belongs:
And after them men approve their sayings. Selah.
14 Like sheep they are folded in Sheol;
Death shepherds them:
And the upright shall rule over them in the morning;
And their form shall be wasted away by Sheol,
So that it is without a dwelling.

15 Surely God shall redeem my soul from the power of Sheol:
For He shall take me. Selah.
16 Fear not thou when a man becomes rich,
When the glory of his house increases:
17 For when he dies he will not take away any [of it];
His glory shall not go down after him.
18 Though in his lifetime he bless his soul
(And [men] praise thee when thou doest well for thyself)
19 He shall go to the generation of his fathers;
For evermore they see not light.
20 Man [who is] in honour, and has not understanding,
Becomes like the beasts that are brought to silence.

THIS psalm touches the high-water mark of Old Testament faith in a future life; and in that respect, as well as in its application of that faith to alleviate the mystery of present inequalities and non-correspondence of desert with condition, is closely related to the noble Psalm lxxiii., with which it has also several verbal identities. Both have the same problem before them—to construct a theodicy, or "to vindicate the ways of God to man"—and both solve it in the same fashion. Both appear to refer to the story of Enoch in their remarkable expression for ultimate reception into the Divine presence. But whether the psalms are contemporaneous cannot be determined from these data. Cheyne regards the treatment of the theme in Psalm lxxiii. as "more skilful," and therefore presumably later than Psalm xlix., which he would place "somewhat before the close of the Persian period." This date rests on the assumption that the amount of certitude as to a future life expressed in the psalm was not realised in Israel till after the exile.

After a solemn summons to all the world to hear the psalmist's utterance of what he has learned by Divine teaching (vv. 1–4), the psalm is divided into

two parts, each closed with a refrain. The former of these (vv. 5–12) contrasts the arrogant security of the prosperous godless with the end that awaits them; while the second (vv. 13–20) contrasts the dreary lot of these victims of vain self-confidence with the blessed reception after death into God's own presence which the psalmist grasped as a certainty for himself, and thereon bases an exhortation to possess souls in patience while the godless prosper, and to be sure that their lofty structures will topple into hideous ruin.

The psalmist's consciousness that he speaks by Divine inspiration, and that his message imports all men, is grandly expressed in his introductory summons. The very name which he gives to the world suggests the latter thought; for it means—the world considered as fleeting. Since we dwell in so transitory an abode, it becomes us to listen to the deep truths of the psalm. These have a message for high and low, for rich and poor. They are like a keen lancet to let out too great fulness of blood from the former, and to teach moderation, lowliness, and care for the Unseen. They are a calming draught for the latter, soothing when perplexed or harmed by "the proud man's contumely." But the psalmist calls for universal attention, not only because his lessons fit all classes, but because they are in themselves "wisdom," and because he himself had first bent his ear to receive them before he strung his lyre to utter them. The brother-psalmist, in Psalm lxxiii., presents himself as struggling with doubt and painfully groping his way to his conclusion. This psalmist presents himself as a divinely inspired teacher, who has received into purged and attentive ears, in many a whisper from God, and

as the result of many an hour of silent waiting, the word which he would now proclaim on the housetops. The discipline of the teacher of religious truth is the same at all times. There must be the bent ear before there is the message which men will recognise as important and true.

There is no parable in the ordinary sense in the psalm. The word seems to have acquired the wider meaning of a weighty didactic utterance, as in Psalm lxxviii. 2. The expression "Open my riddle" is ambiguous, and is by some understood to mean the proposal and by others the solution of the puzzle; but the phrase is more naturally understood of solving than of setting a riddle, and if so, the disproportion between the characters and fortunes of good and bad is the mystery or riddle, and the psalm is its solution.

The main theme of the first part is the certainty of death, which makes infinitely ludicrous the rich man's arrogance. It is one version of

> "There is no armour against Fate;
> Death lays his icy hand on kings."

Therefore how vain the boasting in wealth, when all its heaps cannot buy a day of life! This familiar thought is not all the psalmist's contribution to the solution of the mystery of life's unequal partition of worldly good; but it prepares the way for it, and it lays a foundation for his refusal to be afraid, however pressed by insolent enemies. Very significantly he sets the conclusion, to which observation of the transiency of human prosperity has led him, at the beginning of his "parable." In the parallel psalm (lxxiii.) the singer shows himself struggling from the depths of perplexity up to the sunny heights of faith. But here the poet begins with

the clear utterance of trustful courage, and then vindicates it by the thought of the impotence of wealth to avert death.

The hostility to himself of the self-confident rich boasters appears only for a moment at first. It is described by a gnarled, energetic phrase which has been diversely understood. But it seems clear that the "iniquity" (A.V. and R.V.) spoken of in ver. 5 *b* is not the psalmist's sin, for a reference here to his guilt or to retribution would be quite irrelevant; and if it were the consequences of his own evil that dogged him at his heels, he had every reason to fear, and confidence would be insolent defiance. But the word rendered in the A.V. *heels*, which is retained in the R.V. with a change in construction, may be a participial noun, derived from a verb meaning to trip up or supplant; and this gives a natural coherence to the whole verse, and connects it with the following one. "Pursuers" is a weak equivalent for the literal "those who would supplant me," but conveys the meaning, though in a somewhat enfeebled condition. Ver. 6 is a continuance of the description of the supplanters. They are "men of this world," the same type of man as excites stern disapproval in many psalms: as, for instance, in xvii. 14—a psalm which is closely related to this, both in its portrait of the godless and its lofty hope for the future. It is to be noted that they are not described as vicious or God-denying or defying. They are simply absorbed in the material, and believe that land and money are the real, solid goods. They are the same men as Jesus meant when He said that it was hard for those who trusted in riches to enter into the kingdom of heaven. It has been thought that the existence of such a class points to a late date for the

psalm ; but the reliance on riches does not require large riches to rely on, and may flourish in full perniciousness in very primitive social conditions. A small elevation suffices to lift a man high enough above his fellows to make a weak head giddy. Those to whom material possessions are the only good have a natural enmity towards those who find their wealth in truth and goodness. The poet, the thinker, and, most of all, the religious man, are targets for more or less active "malice," or, at all events, are recognised as belonging to another class, and regarded as singular and "unpractical," if nothing worse. But the psalmist looks far enough ahead to see the end of all the boasting, and points to the great instance of the impotence of material good—its powerlessness to prolong life. It would be more natural to find in ver. 7 the statement that the rich man cannot prolong his own days than that he cannot do so for a "brother." A very slight change in the text would make the initial word of the verse ("brother") the particle of asseveration, which occurs in ver. 15 (the direct antithesis of this verse), and is characteristic of the parallel Psalm lxxiii. With that reading (Ewald, Cheyne, Baethgen, etc.) other slight difficulties are smoothed ; but the present text is attested by the LXX. and other early versions, and is capable of defence. It may be necessary to observe that there is no reference here to any other "redemption" than that of the body from physical death. There is a distinct intention to contrast the man's limited power with God's, for ver. 15 points back to this verse, and declares that God can do what man cannot. Ver. 8 must be taken as a parenthesis, and the construction carried on from ver. 7 to ver. 9, which specifies the purpose of the ransom, if it were possible. No man can secure for

another continuous life or an escape from the necessity of seeing the pit—*i.e.*, going down to the depths of death. It would cost more than all the rich man's store; wherefore he—the would-be ransomer—must abandon the attempt for ever.

The "see" in ver. 10 is taken by many to have the same object as the "see" in ver. 9. "Yea, he shall see it." (So Hupfeld, Hitzig, Perowne, and others.) "The wise die" will then begin a new sentence. But the repetition is feeble, and breaks up the structure of ver. 10 undesirably. The fact stares the rich man in the face that no difference of position or of character affects the necessity of death. Down into that insatiable maw of Sheol ("the ever-asking"?) beauty, wisdom, wealth, folly, and animalism go alike, and it still gapes wide for fresh food. But a strange hallucination in the teeth of all experience is cherished in the "inward thought" of "the men of this world"—namely, that their houses shall continue for ever. Like the godless man in Psalm x., this rich man has reached a height of false security, which cannot be put into words without exposing its absurdity, but which yet haunts his inmost thoughts. The fond imagination of perpetuity is not driven out by the plain facts of life and death. He acts on the presumption of permanence; and he whose working hypothesis is that he is to abide always as his permanent home in his sumptuous palace, is rightly set down as believing in the incredible belief that the common lot will not be his. A man's real belief is that which moulds his life, though he has never formulated it in words. This "inward thought" either underlies the rich godless man's career, or that career is inexplicable. There is an emphatic contrast drawn between what he "sees" and what he, all the while, hugs in his

secret heart. That contrast is lost if the emendation found in the LXX. and adopted by many modern commentators is accepted, according to which, by the transposition of a letter, we get "their grave" instead of "their inward [thought]." A reference to the grave comes too early; and if the sense of ver. 11 *a* is that "their grave (or, the graves) are their houses for ever," there is no parallelism between ver. 11 *a* and *c*. The delusion of continuance is, on the other hand, naturally connected with the proud attempt to make their names immortal by impressing them on their estates. The language of ver. 11 *c* is somewhat ambiguous; but, on the whole, the rendering "they call their lands by their own names" accords best with the context.

Then comes with a crash the stern refrain which pulverises all this insanity of arrogance. The highest distinction among men gives no exemption from the grim law which holds all corporeal life in its gripe. The psalmist does not look, and probably did not see, beyond the external fact of death. He knows nothing of a future for the men whose portion is in this life. As we shall see in the second part of the psalm, the confidence in immortality is for him a deduction from the fact of communion with God here, and, apparently, his bent ear had received no whisper as to any distinction between the godless man and the beast in the regard to their deaths. They are alike "brought to silence." The awful dumbness of the dead strikes on his heart and imagination as most pathetic. "That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once," and now the pale lips are locked in eternal silence, and some ears hunger in vain "for the sound of a voice that is still."

Hupfeld would transfer ver. 13, which begins the

second part, so that it should stand before the refrain, which would then have the Selah, that now comes in peculiarly at the end of ver. 13. But there is nothing unnatural in the first verse of the second part summing up the contents of the first part; and such a summary is needed in order to bring out the contrast between the godless folly and end of the rich men on the one hand, and the hope of the psalmist on the other. The construction of ver. 13 is disputed. The "way" may either mean conduct or fate, and the word rendered in the A.V. and R.V. "folly" has also the meaning of stupid security or self-confidence. It seems best to regard the sentence as not pronouncing again that the conduct described in vv. 6–11 is foolish, but that the end foretold in ver. 12 surely falls on such as have that dogged insensibility to the facts of life which issues in such presumptuous assurance. Many commentators would carry on the sentence into ver. 13 *b*, and extend the "lot" to those who in after-generations approve their sayings. But the paradoxical fact that notwithstanding each generation's experience the delusion is obstinately maintained from father to son yields a fuller meaning. In either case the notes of the musical interlude fix attention on the thought, in order to make the force of the following contrast greater. That contrast first deals with the fate of godless men after death. The comparison with the "beasts" in the refrain may have suggested the sombre grandeur of the metaphor in ver. 14 *a* and *b*: Sheol is as a great fold into which flocks are driven. There Death rules as the shepherd of that dim realm. What a contrast to the fold and the flock of the other Shepherd, who guides His unterrified sheep through the "valley of the shadow of death"! The waters of stillness beside which this sad shepherd makes

his flock lie down are doleful and sluggish. There is no cheerful activity for these, nor any fair pastures, but they are penned in compelled inaction in that dreadful fold.

So far the picture is comparatively clear, but with the next clause difficulties begin. Does the "morning" mean only the end of the night of trouble, the beginning in this life of the "upright's" deliverance, or have we here an eschatological utterance? The whole of the rest of the verse has to do with the unseen world, and to confine this clause to the temporal triumph of the righteous over their dead oppressors drags in an idea belonging to another sphere altogether. We venture to regard the interpretation of these enigmatical words, which sees in them a dim adumbration of a great morning which will yet stream its light into the land of darkness, and in which not this or that upright man but the class as a whole shall triumph, as the only one which keeps the parts of the verse in unity. It is part of the "riddle" of the psalmist, probably not perfectly explicable to himself. We cannot say that there is here the clear teaching of a resurrection, but there is the germ of it, whether distinctly apprehended by the singer or not. The first glimpses of truth in all regions are vague, and the gazer does not know that the star he sees is a sun. Not otherwise did the great truths of the future life rise on inspired men of old. This psalmist divined, or, more truly, heard in his bent ear, that Good and its lovers should triumph beyond the grave, and that somehow a morning would break for them. But he knew nothing of any such for the godless dead. And the remainder of the verse expresses in enigmatical brevity and obscurity the gloomy fate of those for whom there was no such awakening as

he hoped for himself. Very different renderings have been given of the gnarled words. If we adhere to the accents, the literal translation is, "Their form is [destined] for the wasting of Sheol, from a dwelling-place for it," or "without its dwelling-place"—an obscure saying, which is, however, intelligible when rendered as above. It describes the wasting away of the whole man, not merely his corporeal form, in Sheol, of which the corruption of the body in the grave may stand as a terrible symbol, so that only a thin shred of personality remains, which wanders homeless, unclothed with any house either "of this tabernacle" or any other, and so found drearily naked. Homeless desolation of bare being, from which all that is fair or good has been gnawed away, is awfully expressed in the words. Other renderings, neglecting the accents and amending the text, bring out other meanings: such as "Their form is for corruption; Hades [will be] its dwelling-place" (Jennings and Lowe); "Their form shall waste away. Sheol shall be their castle for ever" (so Cheyne in "Book of Psalms"; in "Orig. of Psalt." *frame* is substituted for *form*, and *palace* for *castle*. Baethgen gives up the attempt to render the text or to restore it, and takes to asterisks).

To this condition of dismal inactivity, as of sheep penned in a fold, of loss of beauty, of wasting and homelessness, the psalmist opposes the fate which he has risen to anticipate for himself. Ver. 15 is plainly antithetical, not only to ver. 14, but to ver. 7. The "redemption" which was impossible with men is possible with God. The emphatic particle of asseveration and restriction at the beginning is, as we have remarked, characteristic of the parallel Psalm lxiii. It here strengthens the expression of confidence, and points to God as

alone able to deliver His servant from the "hand of Sheol." That deliverance is clearly not escape from the universal lot, which the psalmist has just proclaimed so impressively as affecting wise and foolish alike. But while he expects that he, too, will have to submit to the strong hand that plucks all men from their dwelling-places, he has won the assurance that sameness of outward lot covers absolute difference in the conditions of those who are subjected to it. The faith that he will be delivered from the power of Sheol does not necessarily imply the specific kind of deliverance involved in resurrection, and it may be a question whether that idea was definitely before the singer's mind. But, without dogmatising on that doubtful point, plainly his expectation was of a life beyond death, the antithesis of the cheerless one just painted in such gloomy colours. The very brevity of the second clause of the verse makes it the more emphatic.

The same pregnant phrase occurs again with the same emphasis in Psalm lxxiii. 24, "Thou shalt take me," and in both passages the psalmist is obviously quoting from the narrative of Enoch's translation. "God took him" (Gen. v. 24). He has fed his faith on that signal instance of the end of a life of communion with God, and it has confirmed the hopes which such a life cannot but kindle, so that he is ready to submit to the common lot, bearing in his heart the assurance that, in experiencing it, he will not be driven by that grim shepherd into his gloomy fold, but lifted by God into His own presence. As in Psalms xvi. and xvii., we have here the certainty of immortality filling a devout soul as the result of present experience of communion with God. These great utterances as to the two contrasted conditions after death are, in one

aspect, the psalmist's "riddle," in so far as they are stated in "dark and cloudy words," but, in another view, are the solution of the painful enigma of the prosperity of the godless and the afflictions of the righteous. Fittingly the Selah follows this solemn, great hope.

As the first part began with the psalmist's encouraging of himself to put away fear, so the whole ends with the practical application of the truths declared, in the exhortation to others not to be terrified nor bewildered out of their faith by the insolent inflated prosperity of the godless. The lofty height of wholesome mysticism reached in the anticipation of personal immortality is not maintained in this closing part. The ground of the exhortation is simply the truth proclaimed in the first part, with additional emphasis on the thought of the necessary parting from all wealth and pomp. "Shrouds have no pockets." All the external is left behind, and much of the inward too—such as habits, desires, ways of thinking, and acquirements which have been directed to and bounded by the seen and temporal. What is not left behind is character and desert. The man of this world is wrenched from his possessions by death; but he who has made God his portion here carries his portion with him, and does not enter on that other state

> "in utter nakedness,
> But trailing clouds of glory does he come
> *To* God who is his home."

Our Lord's parable of the foolish rich man has echoes of this psalm. "Whose shall those things be?" reminds us of "He will not take away any of it"; and "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up . . . take thine ease" is the best explanation of what the psalmist

meant by "blessing his soul." The godless rich man of the psalm is a selfish and godless one. His condemnation lies not in his wealth, but in his absorption in it and reliance upon it, and in his cherishing the dream of perpetual enjoyment of it, or at least shunning the thought of its loss. Therefore, "when he dies, he goes to the generation of his fathers," who are conceived of as gathered in solemn assembly in that dark realm. "Generation" here implies, as it often does, moral similarity. It includes all the man's predecessors of like temper with himself. A sad company sitting there in the dark! *Going to them* is not identical with death nor with burial, but implies at least some rudimentary notion of companionship according to character, in that land of darkness. The *darkness* is the privation of all which deserves the name of light, whether it be joy or purity. Ver. 18 *b* is by some taken to be the psalmist's address to the rich man, and by others to be spoken to the disciple who had been bidden not to fear. In either case it brings in the thought of the popular applause which flatters success, and plays chorus to the prosperous man's own self-congratulations. Like ver. 13 *b*, it gibbets the servile admiration of such men as indicating what the praisers would fain themselves be, and as a disclosure of that base readiness to worship the rising sun, which has for its other side contempt for the unfortunate who should receive pity and help.

The refrain is slightly but significantly varied. Instead of "abides not," it reads "and has not understanding." The alteration in the Hebrew is very slight, the two verbs differing only by one letter, and the similarity in sound is no doubt the reason for the selection of the word. But the change brings out the limitations under which the first form of the refrain is

true, and guards the whole teaching of the psalm from being taken to be launched at rich men as such. The illuminative addition in this second form shows that it is the abuse of riches, when they steal away that recognition of God and of man's mortality which underlies the psalmist's conception of *understanding*, that is doomed to destruction like the beasts that are put to silence. The two forms of the refrain are, then, precisely parallel to our Lord's two sayings, when He first declared that it was hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, and then, in answer to His disciples' surprise, put His dictum in the more definite form, "How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom!"

PSALM L.

1 El, Elohim, Jehovah has spoken, and called the earth
From the place of sunrise to its going down.
2 From Zion, the perfection of beauty,
God has shone.
3 Our God will come, and cannot be silent:
Fire devours before Him,
And round Him it is tempestuous exceedingly.
4 He calls to the heavens above,
And to the earth, that He may judge His people:
5 "Assemble to Me My favoured ones,
Who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice."
6 And the heavens declare His righteousness;
For God—the judge is He. Selah.

7 Hearken, My people, and I will speak;
O Israel, and I will witness against thee:
Elohim, thy God am I.
8 Not on [account of] thy sacrifices will I reprove thee;
Yea, thy burnt offerings are before me continually.
9 I will not take a bullock out of thy house,
Nor out of thy folds he-goats.
10 For Mine is every beast of the forest,
The cattle on the mountains in thousands.
11 I know every bird of the mountains,
And whatever moves on the field is before Me.
12 If I were hungry, I would not tell thee:
For Mine is the world and its fulness.
13 Shall I eat the flesh of bulls, or the blood of he-goats shall I drink?
14 Sacrifice to God thanksgiving;
And pay thy vows to the Most High:
15 And call on Me in the day of trouble.
I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.

16 But to the wicked [man] God saith,
What hast thou to do to tell My statutes,
And that thou takest My covenant into thy mouth?
17 And [all the while] thou hatest correction,
And flingest My words behind thee.
18 If thou seest a robber, thou art pleased with him;
And with adulterers is thy portion.
19 Thy mouth thou dost let loose for evil,
And thy tongue weaves deceit.
20 Thou sittest [and] speakest against thy brother;
At thine own mother's son thou aimest a thrust.
21 These things hast thou done, and I was silent;
Thou thoughtest that I was altogether like thyself:
I will reprove thee, and order [the proofs] before thine eyes.

22 Consider now this, ye that forget God,
Lest I tear you in pieces, and there be no deliverer:
23 He who offers thanksgiving as sacrifice glorifies Me;
And he who orders his way [aright]—I will show him the salvation of God.

THIS is the first of the Asaph psalms, and is separated from the other eleven (Psalms lxxiii.–lxxxiii.) for reasons that do not appear. Probably they are no more recondite than the verbal resemblance between the summons to all the earth at the beginning of Psalm xlix. and the similar proclamation in the first verses of Psalm l. The arrangement of the Psalter is often obviously determined by such slight links. The group has certain features in common, of which some appear here: *e.g.*, the fondness for descriptions of theophanies; the prominence given to God's judicial action; the preference for the Divine names of El, Adonai (the Lord), Elyōn (Most High). Other peculiarities of the class—*e.g.*, the love for the designation "Joseph" for the nation, and delight in the image of the Divine Shepherd—are not found in this psalm. It contains no historical allusions which aid in dating it. The leading idea of

it—viz., the depreciation of outward sacrifice—is unhesitatingly declared by many to have been impossible in the days of the Levite Asaph, who was one of David's musical staff. But is it so certain that such thoughts were foreign to the period in which Samuel declared that obedience was better than sacrifice? Certainly the tone of the psalm is that of later prophets, and there is much probability in the view that Asaph is the name of the family or guild of singers from whom these psalms came rather than that of an individual.

The structure is clear and simple. There is, first, a magnificent description of God's coming to judgment and summoning heaven and earth to witness while He judges His people (vv. 1–6). The second part (vv. 7–15) proclaims the worthlessness of sacrifice; and the third (vv. 16–21) brands hypocrites who pollute God's statutes by taking them into their lips while their lives are foul. A closing strophe of two verses (22, 23) gathers up the double lesson of the whole.

The first part falls again into two, of three verses each, of which the former describes the coming of the judge, and the latter the opening of the judgment. The psalm begins with a majestic heaping together of the Divine names, as if a herald were proclaiming the style and titles of a mighty king at the opening of a solemn assize. No English equivalents are available, and it is best to retain the Hebrew, only noting that each name is separated from the others by the accents in the original, and that to render either "the mighty God" (A.V.) or "the God of gods" is not only against that punctuation, but destroys the completeness symbolised by the threefold designation. Hupfeld finds the heaping together of names "frosty." Some ears will rather hear in it a solemn reiteration like the boom

of triple thunders. Each name has its own force of meaning. El speaks of God as mighty; Elohim, as the object of religious fear; Jehovah, as the self-existent and covenant God.

The earth from east to west is summoned, not to be judged, but to witness God judging His people. The peculiarity of this theophany is that God is not represented as coming from afar or from above, but as letting His light blaze out from Zion, where He sits enthroned. As His presence made the city "the joy of the whole earth" (Psalm xlviii. 2), so it makes Zion the sum of all beauty. The idea underlying the representation of His shining out of Zion is that His presence among His people makes certain His judgment of their worship. It is the poetic clothing of the prophetic announcement, "You only have I known of all the inhabitants of the earth; therefore will I punish you for your iniquities." The seer beholds the dread pomp of the advent of the Judge, and describes it with accessories familiar in such pictures: devouring fire is His forerunner, as clearing a path for Him among tangles of evil, and wild tempests whirl round His stable throne. "He cannot be silent." The form of the negation in the original is emotional or emphatic, conveying the idea of the impossibility of His silence in the face of such corruptions.

The opening of the court or preparation for the judgment follows. That Divine voice speaks, summoning heaven and earth to attend as spectators of the solemn process. The universal significance of God's relation to and dealings with Israel, and the vindication of His righteousness by His inflexible justice dealt out to their faults, are grandly taught in this making heaven and earth assessors of that tribunal. The court having

been thus constituted, the Judge on His seat, the spectators standing around, the accused are next brought in. There is no need to be prosaically definite as to the attendants who are bidden to escort them. His officers are everywhere, and to ask who they are in the present case is to apply to poetry the measuring lines meant for bald prose. It is more important to note the names by which the persons to be judged are designated. They are "My favoured ones, who have made a covenant with Me by (lit. *over*) sacrifice." These terms carry an indictment, recalling the lavish mercies so unworthily requited, and the solemn obligations so unthankfully broken. The application of the name "favoured ones" to the whole nation is noteworthy. In other psalms it is usually applied to the more devout section, who are by it sharply distinguished from the mass; here it includes the whole. It does not follow that the diversity of usage indicates difference of date. All that is certainly shown is difference of point of view. Here the ideal of the nation is set forth, in order to bring out more emphatically the miserable contrast of the reality. Sacrifice is set aside as worthless in the subsequent verses. But could the psalmist have given clearer indication that his depreciation is not to be exaggerated into entire rejection of external rites, than by thus putting in front of it the worth of sacrifice when offered aright, as the means of founding and sustaining covenant relations with God? If his own words had been given heed to, his commentators would have been saved the blunder of supposing that he is antagonistic to the sacrificial worship which he thus regards.

But before the assize opens, the heavens, which had been summoned to behold, declare beforehand His righteousness, as manifested by the fact that He is

about to judge His people. The Selah indicates that a long-drawn swell of music fills the expectant pause before the Judge speaks from His tribunal.

The second part (vv. 7–15) deals with one of the two permanent tendencies which work for the corruption of religion—namely, the reliance on external worship, and neglect of the emotions of thankfulness and trust. God appeals first to the relation into which He has entered with the people, as giving Him the right to judge. There may be a reference to the Mosaic formula, "I am Jehovah, thy God," which is here converted, in accordance with the usage of this book of the Psalter, into "God (Elohim), thy God." The formula which was the seal of laws when enacted is also the warrant for the action of the Judge. He has no fault to find with the external acts of worship. They are abundant and "continually before Him." Surely this declaration at the outset sets aside the notion that the psalmist was launching a polemic against sacrifices *per se*. It distinctly takes the ground that the habitual offering of these was pleasing to the Judge. Their presentation continually is not reproved, but approved. What then is condemned? Surely it can be nothing but sacrifice without the thanksgiving and prayer required in vv. 14, 15. The irony of vv. 9–13 is directed against the folly of believing that in sacrifice itself God delighted; but the shafts are pointless as against offerings which are embodied gratitude and trust. The gross stupidity of supposing that man's gift makes the offering to be God's more truly than before is laid bare in the fine, sympathetic glance at the free, wild life of forest, mountain, and plain, which is all God's possession, and present to His upholding thought, and by the side of which man's folds are very small affairs.

"The cattle" in ver. 10 are not, as usually, domesticated animals, but the larger wild animals. They graze or roam "on the mountains of a thousand"—a harsh expression, best taken, perhaps, as meaning mountains where thousands [of the cattle] are. But the omission of one letter gives the more natural reading "mountains of God" (*cf.* Psalm xxxvi. 6). It is adopted by Olshausen and Cheyne, and smooths the construction, but has against it its obliteration of the fine thought of the multitudes of creatures peopling the untravelled hills. The word rendered "whatever moves" is obscure; but that meaning is accepted by most. Cheyne in his Commentary gives as alternative "that which comes forth abundantly," and in "Orig. of Psalt.," 473, "offspring." All these are "with Me" —*i.e.*, present to his mind—a parallel to "I know" in the first clause of the same verse.

Vv. 12, 13, turn the stream of irony on another absurdity involved in the superstition attacked—the grossly material thought of God involved in it. What good do bulls' flesh and goats' blood do to Him? But if these are expressions of thankful love, they are delightsome to Him. Therefore the section ends with the declaration that the true sacrifice is thanksgiving and the discharge of vows. Men honour God by asking and taking, not by giving. They glorify Him when, by calling on Him in trouble, they are delivered; and then, by thankfulness and service, as well as by the evidence which their experience gives that prayer is not in vain, they again glorify Him. All sacrifices are God's before they are offered, and do not become any more His by being offered. He neither needs nor can partake of material sustenance. But men's hearts are not His without their glad surrender, in the same

way as after it; and thankful love, trust, and obedience are as the food of God, sacrifices acceptable, well-pleasing to Him.

The third part of the psalm is still sterner in tone. It strikes at the other great corruption of worship by hypocrites. As has been often remarked, it condemns breaches of the second table of the law, just as the former part may be regarded as dealing with transgressions of the first. The eighth, seventh, and ninth commandments are referred to in vv. 18, 19, as examples of the hypocrites' sins. The irreconcilable contradiction of their professions and conduct is vividly brought out in the juxtaposition of "declare My statutes" and "castest My words behind thee." They do two opposite things with the same words—at the same time proclaiming them with all lip-reverence, and scornfully flinging them behind their backs in their conduct. The word rendered in the A.V. "slanderest" is better taken as in margin of the R.V., "givest a thrust," meaning to use violence so as to harm or overthrow.

Hypocrisy finds encouragement in impunity. God's silence is an emphatic way of expressing His patient tolerance of evil unpunished. Such "long-suffering" is meant to lead to repentance, and indicates God's unwillingness to smite. But, as experience shows, it is often abused, and "because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is throughly set in them to do evil." The gross mind has gross conceptions of God. One nemesis of hypocrisy is the dimming of the idea of the righteous Judge. All sin darkens the image of God. When men turn away from God's self-revelation, as they do by transgression and most fatally by hypocrisy, they cannot but make a God after their own image. Browning

has taught us in his marvellous "Caliban on Setebos" how a coarse nature projects its own image into the heavens and calls it God. God made man in His own likeness. Men who have lost that likeness make God in theirs, and so sink deeper in evil till He speaks. Then comes an apocalypse to the dreamer, when there is flashed before him what God is and what he himself is. How terror-stricken the gaze of these eyes before which God arrays the deeds of a life, seen for the first time in their true character! It will be the hypocrite's turn to keep silence then, and his thought of a complaisant God like himself will perish before the stern reality.

The whole teaching of the psalm is gathered up in the two closing verses. "Ye that forget God" includes both the superstitious formalists and the hypocrites. Reflection upon such truths as those of the psalm will save them from else inevitable destruction. "This" points on to ver. 23, which is a compendium of both parts of the psalm. The true worship, which consists in thankfulness and praise, is opposed in ver. 23*a* to mere externalisms of sacrifice, as being the right way of glorifying God. The second clause presents a difficulty. But it would seem that we must expect to find in it a summing up of the warning of the third part of the psalm similar to that of the second part in the preceding clause. That consideration goes against the rendering in the R.V. margin (adopted from Delitzsch): "and prepares a way [by which] I may show," etc. The ellipsis of the relative is also somewhat harsh. The literal rendering of the ambiguous words is, "one setting a way." Graetz, who is often wild in his emendations, proposes a very slight one here—the change of one letter, which would yield a good

meaning: "he that is perfect in his way." Cheyne adopts this, and it eases a difficulty. But the received text is capable of the rendering given in the A.V., and, even without the natural supplement "aright," is sufficiently intelligible. To order one's way or "conversation" is, of course, equivalent to giving heed to it according to God's word, and is the opposite of the conduct stigmatised in vv. 16–21. The promise to him who thus acts is that he shall see God's salvation, both in the narrower sense of daily interpositions for deliverance, and in the wider of a full and final rescue from all evil and endowment with all good. The psalm has as keen an edge for modern as for ancient sins. Superstitious reliance on externals of worship survives, though sacrifices have ceased; and hypocrites, with their mouths full of the Gospel, still cast God's words behind them, as did those ancient hollow-hearted proclaimers and breakers of the Law.

PSALM LI.

1 Be gracious to me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness:
According to the greatness of Thy compassions blot out my transgressions.
2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
And from my sin make me clean.
3 For I, I know my transgressions:
And my sin is before me continually.
4 Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned,
And done what is evil in Thine eyes:
That Thou mightest appear righteous when Thou speakest,
And clear when Thou judgest.

5 Behold, in iniquity was I born;
And in sin did my mother conceive me.
6 Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts:
Therefore in the hidden part make me to know wisdom

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean:
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
8 Make me to hear joy and gladness;
That the bones Thou hast crushed may exult.
9 Hide Thy face from my sins, and all my iniquities blot out.

10 A clean heart create for me, O God;
And a steadfast spirit renew within me.
11 Cast me not out from Thy presence;
And Thy holy spirit take not from me.
12 Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation:
And with a willing spirit uphold me.

13 [Then] will I teach trangressors Thy ways;
And sinners shall return to Thee.

14 Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation;
And my tongue shall joyfully sing Thy righteousness.
15 Lord, open my lips;
And my mouth shall declare Thy praise.
16 For Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it:
In burnt offering Thou hast no pleasure.
17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:
A heart broken and crushed, O God, Thou wilt not despise.

18 Do good in Thy good pleasure to Zion:
O build the walls of Jerusalem.
19 Then shalt Thou delight in sacrifices of righteousness, burnt offering and whole burnt offering:
Then shall they offer bullocks on Thine altar.

THE main grounds on which the Davidic authorship of this psalm is denied are four. First, it is alleged that its conceptions of sin and penitence are in advance of his stage of religious development; or, as Cheyne puts it, "David could not have had these ideas" ("Aids to Dev. Study of Crit.," 166). The impossibility depends on a theory which is not yet so established as to be confidently used to settle questions of date. Again, the psalmist's wail, "Against Thee only have I sinned," is said to be conclusive proof that the wrong done to Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah cannot be referred to. But is not *God* the correlative of *sin*, and may not the same act be qualified in one aspect as a crime and in another as a sin, bearing in the latter character exclusive relation to God? The prayer in ver. 18 is the ground of a third objection to the Davidic authorship. Certainly it is hopeless to attempt to explain "Build the walls of Jerusalem" as David's prayer. But the opinion held by both advocates and opponents of David's authorship, that vv. 18, 19, are a later liturgical addition, removes this difficulty. Another ground on which the psalm is brought down

to a late date is the resemblances in it to Isa. xl.–lxvi., which are taken to be echoes of the prophetic words. The resemblances are undoubted; the assumption that the psalmist is the copyist is not.

The personified nation is supposed by most modern authorities to be the speaker; and the date is sometimes taken to be the Restoration period, before the rebuilding of the walls by Nehemiah (Cheyne, "Orig. of Psalt.," 162); by others, the time of the Babylonish exile; and, as usual, by some, the Maccabean epoch. It puts a considerable strain upon the theory of personification to believe that these confessions of personal sin, and longing cries for a clean heart, which so many generations have felt to fit their most secret experiences, were not the wailings of a soul which had learned the burden of individuality, by consciousness of sin, and by realisation of the awful solitude of its relation to God. There are also expressions in the psalm which seem to clog the supposition that the speaker is the nation with great difficulties —*e.g.*, the reference to birth in ver. 5, the prayer for inward truth in ver. 6, and for a clean heart in ver. 10. Baethgen acknowledges that the two latter only receive their full meaning when applied to an individual. He quotes Olshausen, a defender of the national reference, who really admits the force of the objection to it, raised on the ground of these expressions, while he seeks to parry it by saying that "it is not unnatural that the poet, speaking in the singular, should, although he writes for the congregation, bring in occasional expressions here and there which do not fit the community so well as they do each individual in it." The acknowledgment is valuable; the attempt to turn its edge may be left to the reader's judgment.

In vv. 1–9 the psalmist's cry is chiefly for pardon; in

vv. 10–12 he prays chiefly for purity; in vv. 13–17 he vows grateful service. Vv. 18, 19, are probably a later addition.

The psalm begins with at once grasping the character of God as the sole ground of hope. That character has been revealed in an infinite number of acts of love. The very number of the psalmist's sins drove him to contemplate the yet greater number of God's mercies. For where but in an infinite placableness and loving-kindness could he find pardon? If the Davidic authorship is adopted, this psalm followed Nathan's assurance of forgiveness, and its petitions are the psalmist's efforts to lay hold of that assurance. The revelation of God's love precedes and causes true penitence. Our prayer for forgiveness is the appropriation of God's promise of forgiveness. The assurance of pardon does not lead to a light estimate of sin, but drives it home to the conscience.

The petitions of vv. 1, 2, teach us how the psalmist thought of sin. They are all substantially the same, and their repetition discloses the depth of longing in the suppliant. The language fluctuates between plural and singular nouns, designating the evil as "transgressions" and as "iniquity" and "sin." The psalmist regards it, first, as a multitude of separate acts, then as all gathered together into a grim unity. The single deeds of wrong-doing pass before him. But these have a common root; and we must not only recognise acts, but that alienation of heart from which they come—not only sin as it comes out in the life, but as it is coiled round our hearts. Sins are the manifestations of sin.

We note, too, how the psalmist realises his personal responsibility. He reiterates "my"—"*my* transgressions, *my* iniquity, *my* sin." He does not throw blame

on circumstances, or talk about temperament or maxims of society or bodily organisation. All these had some share in impelling him to sin; but after all allowance made for them, the deed is the doer's, and he must bear its burden.

The same eloquent synonyms for evil deeds which are found in Psalm xxxii. occur again here. "Transgression" is literally *rebellion*; "iniquity," *that which is twisted* or *bent*; "sin," *missing a mark.* Sin is rebellion, the uprising of the will against rightful authority—not merely the breach of abstract propriety or law, but opposition to a living Person, who has right to obedience. The definition of virtue is obedience to God, and the sin in sin is the assertion of independence of God and opposition to His will.

Not less profound is that other name, which regards sin as "iniquity" or distortion. Then there is a straight line to which men's lives should run parallel. Our life's paths should be like these conquering Roman roads, turning aside for nothing, but going straight to their aim over mountain and ravine, stream or desert. But this man's passion had made for him a crooked path, where he found no end, "in wandering mazes lost." Sin is, further, missing an aim, the aim being either the Divine purpose for man, the true Ideal of manhood, or the satisfaction proposed by the sinner to himself as the result of his sin. In both senses every sin misses the mark.

These petitions show also how the psalmist thought of forgiveness. As the words for sin give a threefold view of it, so those for pardon set it forth in three aspects. "Blot out";—that petition conceives of forgiveness as being the erasure of a writing, perhaps of an indictment. Our past is a blurred manuscript, full of

false and bad things. The melancholy theory of some thinkers is summed up in the despairing words, "What I have written, I have written." But the psalmist knew better than that; and we should know better than he did. Our souls may become palimpsests; and, as devotional meditations might be written by a saint on a parchment that had borne foul legends of false gods, the bad writing on them may be obliterated, and God's law be written there. "Wash me thoroughly" needs no explanation. But the word employed is significant, in that it probably means washing by kneading or beating, not by simple rinsing. The psalmist is ready to submit to any painful discipline, if only he may be cleansed. "Wash me, beat me, tread me down, hammer me with mallets, dash me against stones, do anything with me, if only these foul stains are melted from the texture of my soul." The psalmist had not heard of the alchemy by which men can "wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb"; but he held fast by God's "loving-kindness," and knew the blackness of his own sin, and groaned under it; and therefore his cry was not in vain. An anticipation of the Christian teaching as to forgiveness lies in his last expression for pardon, "make me clean," which is the technical word for the priestly act of declaring ceremonial purity, and for the other priestly act of making as well as declaring clean from the stains of leprosy. The suppliant thinks of his guilt not only as a blotted record or as a polluted robe, but as a fatal disease, the "first-born of death," and as capable of being taken away only by the hand of the Priest laid on the feculent mass. We know who put out His hand and touched the leper, and said, "I will: be thou clean."

The petitions for cleansing are, in ver. 3, urged on

the ground of the psalmist's consciousness of sin. Penitent confession is a condition of forgiveness. There is no need to take this verse as giving the reason why the psalmist offered his prayer, rather than as presenting a plea why it should be answered. Some commentators have adopted the former explanation, from a fear lest the other should give countenance to the notion that repentance is a meritorious cause of forgiveness; but that is unnecessary scrupulousness. "Sin is always sin, and deserving of punishment, whether it is confessed or not. Still, confession of sin is of importance on this account—that God will be gracious to none but to those who confess their sin" (Luther, quoted by Perowne).

Ver. 4 sounds the depths in both its clauses. In the first the psalmist shuts out all other aspects of his guilt, and is absorbed in its solemnity as viewed in relation to God. It is asked, How could David have thought of his sin, which had in so many ways been "against" others, as having been "against Thee, Thee only"? As has been noted above, this confession has been taken to demonstrate conclusively the impossibility of the Davidic authorship. But surely it argues a strange ignorance of the language of a penitent soul, to suppose that such words as the psalmist's could be spoken only in regard to sins which had no bearing at all on other men. David's deed had been a crime against Bathsheba, against Uriah, against his family and his realm; but these were not its blackest characteristics. Every crime against man is sin against God. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these . . . ye have done it unto Me" is the spirit of the Decalogue as well as the language of Jesus. And it is only when considered as having relation to God that

crimes are darkened into sins. The psalmist is stating a strictly true and profound thought when he declares that he has sinned "against Thee only." Further, that thought has, for the time being, filled his whole horizon. Other aspects of his shameful deed will torture him enough in coming days, even when he has fully entered into the blessedness of forgiveness; but they are not present to his mind now, when the one awful thought of his perverted relation to God swallows up all others. A man who has never felt that all-engrossing sense of his sin as against God only has much to learn.

The second clause of ver. 4 opens the question whether "in order that" is always used in the Old Testament in its full meaning as expressing intention, or sometimes in the looser signification of "so that," expressing result. Several passages usually referred to on this point (*e.g.*, Psalm xxx. 12; Exod. xi. 9; Isa. xliv. 9; Hos. viii. 4) strongly favour the less stringent view, which is also in accordance with the genius of the Hebrew race, who were not metaphysicians. The other view, that the expression here means "in order that," insists on grammatical precision in the cries of a penitent heart, and clogs the words with difficulty. If their meaning is that the psalmist's sin was intended to show forth God's righteousness in judging, the intention must have been God's, not the sinner's; and such a thought not only ascribes man's sin directly to God, but is quite irrelevant to the psalmist's purpose in the words. For he is not palliating his transgression or throwing it on Divine predestination (as Cheyne takes him to be doing), but is submitting himself, in profoundest abasement of undivided guilt, to the just judgment of God. His prayer for forgiveness is accompanied with willingness to submit to chastisement, as all true desire for

pardon is. He makes no excuses for his sin, but submits himself unconditionally to the just judgment of God. "Thou remainest the Holy One; I am the sinner; and therefore Thou mayest, with perfect justice, punish me and spurn me from Thy presence" (Stier).

Vv. 5, 6, are marked as closely related by the "Behold" at the beginning of each. The psalmist passes from penitent contemplation and confession of his acts of sin to acknowledge his sinful nature, derived from sinful parents. "Original sin" is theological terminology for the same facts which science gathers together under the name of "heredity." The psalmist is not responsible for later dogmatic developments of the idea, but he feels that he has to confess not only his acts but his nature. "A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit." The taint is transmitted. No fact is more plain than this, as all the more serious observers of human life and of their own characters have recognised. Only a superficial view of humanity or an inadequate conception of morality can jauntily say that "all children are born good." Theologians have exaggerated and elaborated, as is their wont, and so have made the thought repugnant; but the derived sinful bias of human nature is a fact, not a dogma, and those who know it and their own share of it best will be disposed to agree with Browning, in finding one great reason for believing in Biblical religion, that—

> "'Tis the faith that launched point-blank her dart
> At the head of a lie—taught Original Sin,
> The Corruption of Man's Heart."

The psalmist is not, strictly speaking, either extenuating or aggravating his sin by thus recognising his evil nature. He does not think that sin is the less his,

because the tendency has been inherited. But he is spreading all his condition before God. In fact, he is not so much thinking of his criminality as of his desperate need. From a burden so heavy and so intertwined with himself none but God can deliver him. He cannot cleanse himself, for self is infected. He cannot find cleansing among men, for they too have inherited the poison. And so he is driven to God, or else must sink into despair. He who once sees into the black depths of his own heart will give up thereafter all ideas of "every man his own redeemer." That the psalmist's purpose was not to minimise his own guilt is clear, not only from the tone of the psalm, but from the antithesis presented by the Divine desire after inward truth in the next verse, which is out of place if this verse contains a palliation for sin.

We can scarcely miss the bearing of this verse on the question of whether the psalm is the confession of an individual penitent or that of the nation. It strongly favours the former view, though it does not make the latter absolutely impossible.

The discovery of inherent and inherited sinfulness brings with it another discovery—that of the penetrating depth of the requirements of God's law. He cannot be satisfied with outside conformity in deed. The more intensely conscience realises sin, the more solemnly rises before it the Divine ideal of man in its inwardness as well as in its sweep. Truth within—inward correspondence with His will, and absolute sincerity of soul are His desire. But I am "born in iniquity": a terrible antithesis, and hopeless but for one hope, which dawns over the suppliant like morning on a troubled sea. If we cannot ask God to make us what He wishes us to be, these two discoveries of our nature and of His

will are open doorways to despair; but he who apprehends them wisely will find in their conjoint operation a force impelling him to prayer, and therefore to confidence. Only God can enable such a Being as man to become such as He will delight in; and since He seeks for truth within, He thereby pledges Himself to give the truth and wisdom for which He seeks.

Meditation on the sin which was ever before the psalmist, passes into renewed prayers for pardon, which partly reiterate those already offered in vv. 1, 2. The petition in ver. 7 for purging with hyssop alludes to sprinkling of lepers and unclean persons, and indicates both a consciousness of great impurity and a clear perception of the symbolic meaning of ritual cleansings. "Wash me" repeats a former petition; but now the psalmist can venture to dwell more on the thought of future purity than he could do then. The approaching answer begins to make its brightness visible through the gloom, and it seems possible to the suppliant that even his stained nature shall glisten like sunlit snow. Nor does that expectation exhaust his confidence. He hopes for "joy and gladness." His bones have been crushed—*i.e.*, his whole self has been, as it were, ground to powder by the weight of God's hand; but restoration is possible. A penitent heart is not too bold when it asks for joy. There is no real well-founded gladness without the consciousness of Divine forgiveness. The psalmist closes his petitions for pardon (ver. 9) with asking God to "hide His face from his sins," so that they be, as it were, no more existent for Him, and, by a repetition of the initial petition in ver. 1, for the blotting out of "all mine iniquities."

The second principal division begins with ver. 10, and is a prayer for purity, followed by vows of glad ser-

vice. The prayer is contained in three verses (10–12), of which the first implores complete renewal of nature, the second beseeches that there may be no break between the suppliant and God, and the third asks for the joy and willingness to serve which would flow from the granting of the desires preceding. In each verse the second clause has "spirit" for its leading word, and the middle one of the three asks for "*Thy* holy spirit." The petitions themselves, and the order in which they occur, are deeply significant, and deserve much more elucidation than can be given here. The same profound consciousness of inward corruption which spoke in the former part of the psalm shapes the prayer for renewal. Nothing less than a new creation will make this man's heart "clean." His past has taught him that. The word employed is always used of God's creative act; and the psalmist feels that nothing less than the power which brooded over the face of primeval chaos, and evolved thence an ordered world, can deal with the confused ruin within himself. What he felt that he must have is what prophets promised (Jer. xxiv. 7; Ezek. xxxvi. 26) and Christ has brought —a new creation, in which, while personality remains unaffected, and the components of character continue as before, a real new life is bestowed, which stamps new directions on affections, gives new aims, impulses, convictions, casts out inveterate evils, and gradually changes "all but the basis of the soul." A desire for pardon which does not unfold into such longing for deliverance from the misery of the old self is not the offspring of genuine penitence, but only of base fear.

"A steadfast spirit" is needful in order to keep a cleansed heart clean; and, on the other hand, when, by cleanness of heart, a man is freed from the perturba-

tions of rebellious desires and the weakening influences of sin, his spirit will be steadfast. The two characteristics sustain each other. Consciousness of corruption dictated the former desire; penitent recognition of weakness and fluctuation inspires the latter. It may be observed, too, that the triad of petitions having reference to "spirit" has for its central one a prayer for God's Spirit, and that the other two may be regarded as dependent on that. Where God's Spirit dwells, the human spirit in which it abides will be firm with uncreated strength. His energy, being infused into a tremulous, changeful humanity, will make it stable. If we are to stand fast, we must be stayed on God.

The group of petitions in ver. 11 is negative. It deprecates a possible tragic separation from God, and that under two aspects. "Part me not from Thee; part not Thyself from me." The former prayer, "Cast me not out from Thy presence," is by some explained according to the analogy of other instances of the occurrence of the phrase, where it means expulsion from the land of Israel; and is claimed, thus interpreted, as a clear indication that the psalmist speaks in the name of the nation. But however certainly the expression is thus used elsewhere, it cannot, without introducing an alien thought, be so interpreted in its present connection, imbedded in petitions of the most spiritual and individual character: much rather, the psalmist is recoiling from what he knows only too well to be the consequence of an unclean heart—separation from God, whether in the sense of exclusion from the sanctuary, or in the profounder sense, which is not too deep for such a psalm, of conscious loss of the light of God's face. He dreads being, Cain-like, shut out from that presence which is life; and he knows that, unless his

previous prayer for a clean heart is answered, that dreary solitude of great darkness must be his lot. The sister petition, "Take not Thy holy spirit from me," contemplates the union between God and him from the other side. He regards himself as possessing that Divine spirit; for he knows that, notwithstanding his sin, God has not left him, else he would not have these movements of godly sorrow and yearnings for purity. There is no reason to commit the anachronism of supposing that the psalmist had any knowledge of New Testament teaching of a personal Divine Spirit. But if we may suppose that he is David, this prayer has special force. That anointing which designated and fitted him for kingly office symbolised the gift of a Divine influence accompanying a Divine call. If we further remember how it had fared with his predecessor, from whom, because of impenitence, "the Spirit of the Lord departed, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him," we understand how Saul's successor, trembling as he remembers his fate, prays with peculiar emphasis, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me."

The last member of the triad, in ver. 12, looks back to former petitions, and asks for restoration of the "joy of Thy salvation," which had lain like dew on this man before he fell. In this connection the supplication for joy follows on the other two, because the joy which it desires is the result of their being granted. For what is "Thy salvation" but the gift of a clean heart and a steadfast spirit, the blessed consciousness of unbroken closeness of communion with God, in which the suppliant suns himself in the beams of God's face, and receives an uninterrupted communication of His Spirit's gifts? These are the sources of pure joy, lasting as God Himself, and victorious over all occasions for

surface sorrow. The issue of all these gifts will be "a willing spirit," delighting to obey, eager to serve. If God's Spirit dwells in us, obedience will be delight. To serve God because we must is not service. To serve Him because we had rather do His will than anything else is the service which delights Him and blesses us. The word rendered "willing" comes by a very natural process, to mean nobles. God's servants are princes and lords of everything besides, themselves included. Such obedience is freedom. If desires flow with equable motion parallel to God's will, there is no sense of restraint in keeping within limits beyond which we do not desire to go. "I will walk at liberty; for I keep Thy precepts."

The last part of the psalm runs over with joyful vows—first, of magnifying God's name (vv. 13–15), and then of offering true sacrifices. A man who has passed through such experiences as the psalmist's, and has received the blessings for which he prayed, cannot be silent. The instinct of hearts touched by God's mercies is to speak of them to others. And no man who can say "I will tell what He has done for my soul" is without the most persuasive argument to bring to bear on others. A piece of autobiography will touch men who are unaffected by elaborate reasonings and deaf to polished eloquence. The impulse and the capacity to "teach transgressors Thy ways" are given in the experience of sin and forgiveness; and if any one has not the former, it is questionable whether he has, in any real sense or large measure, received the latter. The prayer for deliverance from blood-guiltiness in ver 14 breaks for a moment the flow of vows; but only for a moment. It indicates how amid them the psalmist preserved his sense of guilt, and how little he

was disposed to think lightly of the sins of whose forgiveness he had prayed himself into the assurance. Its emergence here, like a black rock pushing its grimness up through a sparkling, sunny sea, is no sign of doubt whether his prayers had been answered; but it marks the abiding sense of sinfulness, which must ever accompany abiding gratitude for pardon and abiding holiness of heart. It seems hard to believe, as the advocates of a national reference in the psalm are obliged to do, that "blood-guiltiness" has no special reference to the psalmist's crime, but is employed simply as typical of sin in general. The mention of it finds a very obvious explanation on the hypothesis of Davidic authorship, and a rather constrained one on any other.

Ver. 16 introduces the reason for the preceding vow of grateful praise, as is shown by the initial "For." The psalmist will bring the sacrifices of a grateful heart making his lips musical, because he has learned that these, and not ritual offerings, are acceptable. The same depreciation of external sacrifices is strongly expressed in Psalm xl. 6, and here, as there, is not to be taken as an absolute condemnation of these, but as setting them decisively below spiritual service. To suppose that prophets or psalmists waged a polemic against ritual observances *per se* misapprehends their position entirely. They do war against "the sacrifice of the wicked," against external acts which had no inward reality corresponding to them, against reliance on the outward and its undue exaltation. The authors of the later addition to this psalm had a true conception of its drift when they appended to it, not as a correction of a heretical tendency, but as a liturgical addition in full harmony with its spirit, the vow to

"offer whole burnt offerings on" the restored "altar," when God should again build up Zion.

The psalmist's last words are immortal. "A heart broken and crushed, O God, Thou wilt not despise." But they derive still deeper beauty and pathos when it is observed that they are spoken after confession has been answered to his consciousness by pardon, and longing for purity by at least some bestowal of it. The "joy of Thy salvation," for which he had prayed, has begun to flow into his heart. The "bones" which had been "crushed" are beginning to reknit, and thrills of gladness to steal through his frame; but still he feels that with all these happy experiences contrite consciousness of his sin must mingle. It does not rob his joy of one rapture, but it keeps it from becoming careless. He goes safely who goes humbly. The more sure a man is that God has put away the iniquity of his sin, the more should he remember it; for the remembrance will vivify gratitude and bind close to Him without whom there can be no steadfastness of spirit nor purity of life. The clean heart must continue contrite, if it is not to cease to be clean.

The liturgical addition implies that Jerusalem is in ruins. It cannot be supposed without violence to come from David. It is not needed in order to form a completion to the psalm, which ends more impressively, and has an inner unity and coherence, if the deep words of ver. 17 are taken as its close.

PSALM LII.

1 Why boastest thou in wickedness, O tyrant?
God's loving-kindness lasts always.
2 Destructions does thy tongue devise;
Like a sharpened razor, thou framer of deceit!
3 Thou lovest evil rather than good;
A lie rather than speaking righteousness. Selah.

4 Thou lovest all words that swallow men up,
Thou deceitful tongue!
5 So God shall break thee down for ever,
Shall lay hold of thee and drag thee out of the tent,
And root thee out of the land of the living. Selah.

6 And the righteous shall see and fear,
And at him shall they laugh.
7 "See! the man that made not God his stronghold,
And trusted in the abundance of his wealth,
And felt strong in his evil desire."

8 But I am like a flourishing olive tree in the house of God:
I trust in the loving-kindness of God for ever and aye.
9 I will give Thee thanks for ever, for Thou hast done [this]:
And I will wait on Thy name before Thy favoured ones, for it is good.

THE progress of feeling in this psalm is clear, but there is no very distinct division into strophes, and one of the two Selahs does not mark a transition, though it does make a pause. First, the poet, with a few indignant and contemptuous touches, dashes on his canvas an outline portrait of an arrogant oppressor, whose weapon was slander and his words like pits of

ruin. Then, with vehement, exulting metaphors, he pictures his destruction. On it follow reverent awe of God, whose justice is thereby displayed, and deepened sense in righteous hearts of the folly of trust in anything but Him. Finally, the singer contrasts with thankfulness his own happy continuance in fellowship with God with the oppressor's fate, and renews his resolve of praise and patient waiting.

The themes are familiar, and their treatment has nothing distinctive. The portrait of the oppressor does not strike one as a likeness either of the Edomite herdsman Doeg, with whose betrayal of David's asylum at Nob the superscription connects the psalm, or of Saul, to whom Hengstenberg, feeling the difficulty of seeing Doeg in it, refers it. Malicious lies and arrogant trust in riches were not the crimes that cried for vengeance in the bloody massacre at Nob. Cheyne would bring this group of "Davidic" psalms (lii.–lix.) down to the Persian period ("Orig. of Psalt.," 121–23). Olshausen, after Theodore of Mopsuestia (see Cheyne *loc. cit.*) to the Maccabean. But the grounds alleged are scarcely strong enough to carry more than the weight of a "may be"; and it is better to recognise that, if the superscription is thrown over, the psalm itself does not yield sufficiently characteristic marks to enable us to fix its date. It may be worth considering whether the very absence of any obvious correspondences with David's circumstances does not show that the superscription rested on a tradition earlier than itself, and not on an editor's discernment.

The abrupt question at the beginning reveals the psalmist's long-pent indignation. He has been silently brooding over the swollen arrogance and malicious lies of the tyrant, till he can restrain himself no longer, and

out pours a fiery flood. Evil gloried in is worse than evil done. The word rendered in the A.V. and R.V. "mighty man" is here used in a bad sense, to indicate that he has not only a giant's power, but uses it tyrannously, like a giant. How dramatically the abrupt question is followed by the equally abrupt thought of the ever-during loving-kindness of God! That makes the tyrant's boast supremely absurd, and the psalmist's confidence reasonable, even in face of hostile power.

The prominence given to sins of speech is peculiar. We should have expected high-handed violence rather than these. But the psalmist is tracking the deeds to their source; and it is not so much the tyrant's words as his love of a certain kind of words which is adduced as proof of his wickedness. These words have two characteristics in addition to boastfulness. They are false and destructive. They are, according to the forcible literal meaning in ver. 4, "words of swallowing." They are, according to the literal meaning of "destructions," in ver. 2, "yawning gulfs." Such words lead to acts which make a tyrant. They flow from perverted preference of evil to good. Thus the deeds of oppression are followed up to their den and birthplace. Part of the description of the "words" corresponds to the fatal effect of Doeg's report; but nothing in it answers to the other part—falsehood. The psalmist's hot indignation speaks in the triple, direct address to the tyrant, which comes in each case like a lightning flash at the end of a clause (vv. 1, 2, 4). In the second of these the epithet "framing deceit" does not refer to the "sharpened razor," but to the tyrant. If referred to the former, it weakens rather than strengthens the metaphor, by bringing in the idea that the sharp blade misses its proper aim

and wounds cheeks instead of shearing off hair. The Selah of ver. 3 interrupts the description, in order to fix attention, by a pause filled up by music, on the hideous picture thus drawn.

That description is resumed and summarised in ver. 4, which, by the Selahs, is closely bound to ver. 5, in order to enforce the necessary connection of sin and punishment, which is strongly underlined by the "also" or "so" at the beginning of the latter verse. The stern prophecy of destruction is based upon no outward signs of failure in the oppressor's might, but wholly on confidence in God's continual loving-kindness, which must needs assume attributes of justice when its objects are oppressed. A tone of triumph vibrates through the imagery of ver. 5, which is not in the same key as Christ has set for us.

It is easy for those who have never lived under grinding, godless tyranny to reprobate the exultation of the oppressed at the sweeping away of their oppressors; but if the critics had seen their brethren set up as torches to light Nero's gardens, perhaps they would have known some thrill of righteous joy when they heard that he was dead. Three strong metaphors describe the fall of this tyrant. He is broken down, as a building levelled with the ground. He is laid hold of, as a coal in the fire, with tongs (for so the word means), and dragged, as in that iron grip, out of the midst of his dwelling. He is uprooted like a tree with all its pride of leafage. Another blast of trumpets or clang of harps or clash of cymbals bids the listeners gaze on the spectacle of insolent strength laid prone and withering as it lies.

The third movement of thought (vv. 6, 7) deals with the effects of this retribution. It is a conspicuous

demonstration of God's justice and of the folly of reliance on anything but Himself. The fear which it produces in the "righteous" is reverential awe, not dread lest the same should happen to them. Whether or not history and experience teach evil men that "verily there is a God that judgeth," their lessons are not wasted on devout and righteous souls. But this is the tragedy of life, that its teachings are prized most by those who have already learned them, and that those who need them most consider them least. Other tyrants are glad when a rival is swept off the field, but are not arrested in their own course. It is left to "the righteous" to draw the lesson which all men should have learned. Although they are pictured as laughing at the ruin, that is not the main effect of it. Rather it deepens conviction, and is a "modern instance" witnessing to the continual truth of "an old saw." There is one safe stronghold, and only one. He who conceits himself to be strong in his own evil, and, instead of relying on God, trusts in material resources, will sooner or later be levelled with the ground, dragged, resisting vainly the tremendous grasp, from his tent, and laid prostrate, as melancholy a spectacle as a great tree blown down by tempest, with its roots turned up to the sky and its arms with drooping leaves trailing on the ground.

A swift turn of feeling carries the singer to rejoice in the contrast of his own lot. No uprooting does he fear. It may be questioned whether the words "in the house of God" refer to the psalmist or to the olive tree. Apparently there were trees in the Temple area (Psalm xcii. 13); but the parallel in the next clause, "in the loving-kindness of God," points to the reference of the words to the speaker. Dwelling in enjoyment of

God's fellowship, as symbolised by and realised through presence in the sanctuary, whether it were at Nob or in Jerusalem, he dreads no such forcible removal as had befallen the tyrant. Communion with God is the source of flourishing and fruitfulness, and the guarantee of its own continuance. Nothing in the changes of outward life need touch it. The mists which lay on the psalmist's horizon are cleared away for us, who know that "for ever and aye" designates a proper eternity of dwelling in the higher house and drinking the full dew of God's loving-kindness. Such consciousness of present blessedness in communion lifts a soul to prophetic realisation of deliverance, even while no change has occurred in circumstances. The tyrant is still boasting; but the psalmist's tightened hold of God enables him to see "things that are not as though they were," and to anticipate actual deliverance by praise for it. It is the prerogative of faith to alter tenses, and to say, Thou hast done, when the world's grammar would say, Thou wilt do. "I will *wait on* Thy name" is singular, since what is done "in the presence of Thy favoured ones" would naturally be something seen or heard by them. The reading "I will declare" has been suggested. But surely the attitude of patient, silent expectance implied in "wait" may very well be conceived as maintained in the presence of, and perceptible by, those who had like dispositions, and who would sympathise and be helped thereby. Individual blessings are rightly used when they lead to participation in common thankfulness and quiet trust.

PSALM LIII.*

1 **The fool says in his heart, There is no God**
They corrupt *and* make abominable their *iniquity*;
There is no one doing good.
2 *God* looketh down from heaven upon the sons of men,
To see if there is any having discernment seeking after God.
3 *Each of them* is *turned aside*; together they are become putrid;
There is no one doing good;
There is not even one.
4 Do the workers of iniquity not know
Who devour my people [as] they devour bread?
On *God* they do not call.
5 There they feared a [great] fear, *where no fear was*:
For God *has scattered the bones of him that encamps against thee*;
Thou hast put *them* to shame; for God *has rejected them*.
6 Oh that the salvations of Israel were come out of Zion!
When *God* brings back the captivity of His people,
May Jacob exult, may Israel be glad!

IN this psalm we have an Elohistic recast of Psalm xiv., differing from its original in substituting Elohim for Jehovah (four times) and in the language of ver. 5. There are also other slight deviations not affecting the sense. For the exposition the reader is referred to that of Psalm xiv. It is only necessary here to take note of the divergences.

The first of these occurs in ver. 1. The forcible rough construction "they corrupt, they make abominable," is smoothed down by the insertion of "and."

* Italics show variations from text of Psalm xiv.

The editor apparently thought that the loosely piled words needed a piece of mortar to hold them together, but his emendation weakens as well as smooths. On the other hand, he has aimed at increased energy of expression by substituting "iniquity" for "doings" in the same clause, which results in tautology and is no improvement. In ver. 3 the word for "turned aside" is varied, without substantial difference of meaning. The alteration is very slight, affecting only one letter, and may be due to error in transcription or to mere desire to emend. In ver. 4 "all," which in Psalm xiv. precedes "workers of iniquity," is omitted, probably as unnecessary.

The most important changes are in ver. 5, which stands for vv. 5 and 6 of Psalm xiv. The first is the insertion of "where no fear was." These words may be taken as describing causeless panic, or, less probably, as having a subjective reference, and being equal to "while in the midst of careless security." They evidently point to some fact, possibly the destruction of Sennacherib's army. Their insertion shows that the object of the alterations was to adapt an ancient psalm as a hymn of triumph for recent deliverance, thus altering its application from evil-doers within Israel to enemies without. The same purpose is obvious in the transformations effected in the remainder of this verse. Considerable as these are, the recast most ingeniously conforms to the sound of the original. If we could present the two versions in tabular form, the resemblance would appear more strikingly than we can here bring it out. The first variation—*i.e.*, "scatters" instead of "in the generation"—is effected by reading "pizzar" for "b'dhor," a clear case of intentional assonance. Similarly the last word of the verse, "has

rejected them," is very near in consonants and sound to "his refuge" in Psalm xiv. 6. The like effort at retaining the general sound of the earlier psalm runs through the whole verse. Very significantly the complaint of the former singer is turned into triumph by the later, who addresses the delivered Israel with "Thou hast put them to shame," while the other psalm could but address the "fools" with "Ye would put to shame the counsel of the afflicted." In like manner the tremulous hope of the original, "God is his refuge," swells into commemoration of an accomplished fact in "God has rejected them." The natural supposition is that some great deliverance of Israel had just taken place, and inspired this singular attempt to fit old words to new needs. Whatever the historical occasion may have been, the two singers unite in one final aspiration, a sigh of longing for the coming of Israel's full salvation, which is intensified in the recast by being put in the plural ("salvations") instead of the singular, as in Psalm xiv., to express the completeness and manifoldness of the deliverance thus yearned for of old, and not yet come in its perfection.

PSALM LIV.

1 O God, by Thy name save me,
And by Thy might right me.
2 O God, hear my prayer;
Give ear to the words of my mouth.
3 For strangers are risen up against me,
And violent men seek my soul:
They set not God before them. Selah.

4 Behold, God is a helper for me:
The Lord is He that sustains my soul.
5 He will requite evil to the liers in wait for me:
In Thy troth destroy them.
6 Of [my own] free impulse will I sacrifice to Thee:
I will thank Thy name, for it is good.
7 For from all distress it has delivered me;
And my eye has seen [its desire] on my enemies.

THE tone and language of this psalm have nothing special. The situation of the psalmist is the familiar one of being encompassed by enemies. His mood is the familiar one of discouragement at the sight of surrounding perils, which passes through petition into confidence and triumph. There is nothing in the psalm inconsistent with the accuracy of the superscription, which ascribes it to David, when the men of Ziph would have betrayed him to Saul. Internal evidence does not suffice to fix its date, if the traditional one is discarded. But there seems no necessity for re-

garding the singer as the personified nation, though there is less objection to that theory in this instance than in some psalms with a more marked individuality and more fervent expression of personal emotion, to which it is proposed to apply it.

The structure is simple, like the thought and expression. The psalm falls into two parts, divided by Selah, —of which the former is prayer, spreading before God the suppliant's straits; and the latter is confident assurance, blended with petition and vows of thanksgiving.

The order in which the psalmist's thoughts run in the first part (vv. 1–3) is noteworthy. He begins with appeal to God, and summons before his vision the characteristics in the Divine nature on which he builds his hope. Then he pleads for the acceptance of his prayer, and only when thus heartened does he recount his perils. That is a deeper faith which begins with what God is, and thence proceeds to look calmly at foes, than that which is driven to God in the second place, as a consequence of an alarmed gaze on dangers. In the latter case fear strikes out a spark of faith in the darkness; in the former, faith controls fear.

The name of God is His manifested nature or character, the sum of all of Him which has been made known by His word or work. In that rich manifoldness of living powers and splendours this man finds reserves of force, which will avail to save him from any peril. That name is much more than a collection of syllables. The expression is beginning to assume the meaning which it has in post-Biblical Hebrew, where it is used as a reverential euphemism for the ineffable Jehovah. Especially to God's power does the singer look with hopeful petitions, as in ver. 1 *b*. But the

whole name is the agent of his salvation. Nothing less than the whole fulness of the manifested God is enough for the necessities of one poor man; and that prayer is not too bold, nor that estimate of need presumptuous, which asks for nothing less. Since it is God's "might" which is appealed to, to judge the psalmist's cause, the judgment contemplated is clearly not the Divine estimate of the moral desert of his doings, or retribution to him for these, but the vindication of his threatened innocence and deliverance of him from enemies. The reason for the prayer is likewise alleged as a plea with God to hear. The psalmist prays because he is ringed about by foes. God will hear because He is so surrounded. It is blessed to know that the same circumstances in our lot which drive us to God incline God to us.

"Strangers," in ver. 3, would most naturally mean foreigners, but not necessarily so. The meaning would naturally pass into that of enemies—men who, even though of the psalmist's own blood, behave to him in a hostile manner. The word, then, does not negative the tradition in the superscription; though the men of Ziph belonged to the tribe of Judah, they might still be called "strangers." The verse recurs in Psalm lxxxvi. 14, with a variation of reading—namely, "proud" instead of "strangers." The same variation is found here in some MSS. and in the Targum. But probably it has crept in here in order to bring our psalm into correspondence with the other, and it is better to retain the existing reading, which is that of the LXX. and other ancient authorities. The psalmist has no doubt that to hunt after his life is a sign of godlessness. The proof that violent men have not "set God before them" is the fact that they "seek his soul." That is a remarkable assumption,

resting upon a very sure confidence that he is in such relation to God that enmity to him is sin. The theory of a national reference would make such identification of the singer's cause with God's most intelligible. But the theory that he is an individual, holding a definite relation to the Divine purposes and being for some end a Divine instrument, would make it quite as much so. And if David, who knew that he was destined to be king, was the singer, his confidence would be natural. The history represents that his Divine appointment was sufficiently known to make hostility to him a manifest indication of rebellion against God. The unhesitating fusion of his own cause with God's could scarcely have been ventured by a psalmist, however vigorous his faith, if all that he had to go on and desired to express was a devout soul's confidence that God would protect him. That may be perfectly true, and yet it may not follow that opposition to a man is godlessness. We cannot regard ourselves as standing in such a relation; but we may be sure that the name, with all its glories, is mighty to save us too.

Prayer is, as so often in the Psalter, followed by immediately deepened assurance of victory. The suppliant rises from his knees, and points the enemies round him to his one Helper. In ver. 4*b* a literal rendering would mislead. "The Lord is among the upholders of my soul" seems to bring God down to a level on which others stand. The psalmist does not mean this, but that God gathers up in Himself, and that supremely, the qualities belonging to the conception of an upholder. It is, in form, an inclusion of God in a certain class. It is, in meaning, the assertion that He is the only true representative of the class. Commentators quote Jephthah's plaintive words to his daughter

as another instance of the idiom: "Alas, my daughter, . . . thou art one of them that trouble me"—*i.e.*, my greatest troubler. That one thought, vivified into new power by the act of prayer, is the psalmist's all-sufficient buckler, which he plants between himself and his enemies, bidding them "behold." Strong in the confidence that has sprung in his heart anew, he can look forward in the certainty that his adversaries (lit. *those who lie in wait for me*) will find their evil recoiling on themselves. The reading of the Hebrew text is, *Evil shall return to*; that of the Hebrew margin, adopted by the A.V. and R.V., is, *He shall requite evil to.* The meanings are substantially the same, only that the one makes the automatic action of retribution more prominent, while the other emphasises God's justice in inflicting it. The latter reading gives increased force to the swift transition to prayer in ver. 5 *b*.

That petition is, like others in similar psalms, proper to the spiritual level of the Old Testament, and not to that of the New; and it is far more reverent, as well as accurate, to recognise fully the distinction than to try to slur it over. At the same time, it is not to be forgotten that the same lofty consciousness of the identity of his cause with God's, which we have already had to notice, operating here in these wishes for the enemies' destruction, gives another aspect to them than that of mere outbursts of private vengeance. That higher aspect is made prominent by the addition "in Thy troth." God's faithfulness to His purposes and promises was concerned in the destruction, because these were pledged to the psalmist's protection. His well-being was so intertwined with God's promises that the Divine faithfulness demanded the sweeping away of his foes. That is evidently not the language which

fits our lips. It implies a special relation to God's plans, and it modifies the character of this apparently vindictive prayer.

The closing verses of this simple, little psalm touch very familiar notes. The faith which has prayed has grown so sure of answer that it already begins to think of the thank-offerings. This is not like the superstitious vow, "I will give so-and-so if Jupiter"—or the Virgin—"will hear me." This praying man knows that he is heard, and is not so much vowing as joyfully anticipating his glad sacrifice. The same incipient personification of the name as in ver. 1 is very prominent in the closing strains. Thank-offerings—not merely statutory and obligatory, but brought by free, uncommanded impulse—are to be offered to "Thy name," because that name is good. Ver. 7 probably should be taken as going even further in the same direction of personification, for "Thy name" is probably to be taken as the subject of "hath delivered." The tenses of the verbs in ver. 7 are perfects. They contemplate the deliverance as already accomplished. Faith sees the future as present. This psalmist, surrounded by strangers seeking his life, can quietly stretch out a hand of faith, and bring near to himself the to-morrow when he will look back on scattered enemies and present, glad sacrifices! That power of drawing a brighter future into a dark present belongs not to those who build anticipations on wishes, but to those who found their forecasts on God's known purpose and character. *The name* is a firm foundation for hope. There is no other.

The closing words express confidence in the enemies' defeat and destruction, with a tinge of feeling that is not permissible to Christians. But the supplement,

"my desire," is perhaps rather too strongly expressive of wish for their ruin. Possibly there needs no supplement at all, and the expression simply paints the calm security of the man protected by God, who can "look upon" impotent hostility without the tremor of an eyelid, because he knows who is his Helper.

PSALM LV.

1 Give ear, O God, to my prayer;
And hide not Thyself from my entreaty.
2 Attend unto me, and answer me:
I am distracted as I muse, and must groan;
3 For the voice of [my] enemy,
On account of the oppression of the wicked;
For they fling down iniquity upon me,
And in wrath they are hostile to me.
4 My heart writhes within me:
And terrors of death have fallen upon me.
5 Fear and trembling come upon me,
Horror wraps me round.
6 Then I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove!
I would fly away, and [there] abide.
7 Lo, then would I migrate far away,
I would lodge in the wilderness. Selah.
8 I would hasten my escape
From stormy wind and tempest.

9 Swallow [them up], Lord; confuse their tongue:
For I see violence and strife in the city.
10 Day and night they go their rounds upon her walls:
And iniquity and mischief are in her midst.
11 Destructions are in her midst:
And from her open market-place depart not oppression and deceit.
12 For it is not an enemy that reviles me—that I could bear:
It is not my hater that magnifies himself against me—from him I could shelter myself:
13 But it is thou, a man my equal,
My companion, and my familiar friend.

14 We who together used to make familiar intercourse sweet,
And walked to the house of God with the crowd.
15 Desolations [fall] on them!
May they go down alive to Sheol!
For wickednesses are in their dwelling, in their midst.

16 As for me, I will cry to God;
And Jehovah will save me.
17 Evening, and morning, and noon will I muse and groan:
And He will hear my voice.
18 He has redeemed my soul in peace, so that they come not near me
For in great numbers were they round me.
19 God will hear, and answer them—
Even He that sitteth throned from of old— Selah.
Them who have no changes
And who fear not God.
20 He has laid his hands on those who were at peace with him:
He has broken his covenant.
21 Smooth are the buttery words of his mouth,
But his heart is war:
Softer are his words than oil,
Yet are they drawn swords.
22 Cast upon Jehovah thy burden,
And He, He will hold thee up:
He will never let the righteous be moved.
23 But Thou, O God, shall bring them down to the depth of the pit:
Men of blood and deceit shall not attain half their days;
But as for me, I will trust in Thee.

THE situation of the psalmist has a general correspondence with that of David in the period of Absalom's rebellion, and the identification of the traitorous friend with Ahithophel is naturally suggested. But there are considerable difficulties in the way of taking that view. The psalmist is evidently in the city, from which he longs to escape; but Ahithophel's treachery was not known to David till after his flight. Would a king have described his counsellor, however trusted, as "a man my equal"? The doubt respecting the identity of the traitor, however, does not seriously

militate against the ordinary view of the date and occasion of the psalm, if we suppose that it belongs to the period immediately before the outburst of the conspiracy, when David was still in Jerusalem, but seeing the treason growing daily bolder, and already beginning to contemplate flight. The singularly passive attitude which he maintained during the years of Absalom's plotting was due to his consciousness of guilt and his submission to punishment. Hitzig ascribes the psalm to Jeremiah, principally on the ground of the resemblance of the prophet's wish for a lodge in the wilderness (Jer. ix. 2) to the psalmist's yearning in vv. 6–8. Cheyne brings it down to the Persian period; Olshausen, to the Maccabean. The Davidic authorship has at least as much to say for itself as any of these conjectures.

The psalm may be regarded as divided into three parts, in each of which a different phase of agitated feeling predominates, but not exclusively. Strong excitement does not marshal emotions or their expression according to artistic proprieties of sequence, and this psalm is all ablaze with it. That vehemence of emotion sufficiently accounts for both the occasional obscurities and the manifest want of strict accuracy in the flow of thought, without the assumption of dislocation of parts or piecing it with a fragment of another psalm. When the heart is writhing within, and tumultuous feelings are knocking at the door of the lips, the words will be troubled and heaped together, and dominant thoughts will repeat themselves in defiance of logical continuity. But, still, complaint and longing sound through the wailing, yearning notes of vv. 1–8; hot indignation and terrible imprecations in the stormy central portion (vv. 9–15); and a calmer

note of confidence and hope, through which, however, the former indignation surges up again, is audible in the closing verses (vv. 16–23).

The psalmist pictures his emotions in the first part, with but one reference to their cause, and but one verse of petition. He begins, indeed, with asking that his prayer may be heard; and it is well when a troubled heart can raise itself above the sea of troubles to stretch a hand towards God. Such an effort of faith already prophesies firm footing on the safe shore. But very pathetic and true to the experience of many a sorrowing heart is the psalmist's immediately subsequent dilating on his griefs. There is a dumb sorrow, and there is one which unpacks its heart in many words and knows not when to stop. The psalmist is *distracted* in his bitter brooding on his troubles. The word means to move restlessly, and may either apply to body or mind, perhaps to both; for Eastern demonstrativeness is not paralysed, but stimulated to bodily tokens, by sorrow. He can do nothing but groan or moan. His heart "writhes" in him. Like an avalanche, deadly terrors have fallen on him and crushed him. Fear and trembling have pierced into his inner being, and "horror" (a rare word, which the LXX. here renders *darkness*) wraps him round or covers him, as a cloak does. It is not so much the pressure of present evil, as the shuddering anticipation of a heavier storm about to burst, which is indicated by these pathetic expressions. The cause of them is stated in a single verse (3). "The voice of the enemy" rather than his hand is mentioned first, since threats and reproaches precede assaults; and it is budding, not full-blown, enmity which is in view. In ver. 3 *b* "oppression" is an imperfect parallelism with "voice," and the

conjectural emendation (which only requires the prefixing of a letter) of "cries," adopted by Cheyne, after Olshausen and others, is tempting. They "fling down iniquity" on him as rocks are hurled or rolled from a height on invaders—a phrase which recalls David's words to his servants, urging flight before Absalom, "lest he bring down evil upon us."

Then, from out of all this plaintive description of the psalmist's agitation and its causes, starts up that immortal strain which answers to the deepest longings of the soul, and has touched responsive chords in all whose lives are not hopelessly outward and superficial—the yearning for repose. It may be ignoble, or lofty and pure; it may mean only cowardice or indolence; but it is deepest in those who stand most unflinchingly at their posts, and crush it down at the command of duty. Unless a soul knows that yearning for a home in stillness, "afar from the sphere of our sorrow," it will remain a stranger to many high and noble things. The psalmist was moved to utter this longing by his painful consciousness of encompassing evils; but the longing is more than a desire for exemption from these. It is the cry of the homeless soul, which, like the dove from the ark, finds no resting-place in a world full of carrion, and would fain return whence it came. "O God, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and we are unquiet till we find rest in Thee." No obligation of duty keeps migratory birds in a land where winter is near. But men are better than birds, because they have other things to think of than repose, and must face, not flee, storms and hurricanes. It is better to have wings "like birds of tempest-loving kind," and to beat up against the wind, than to outfly it in retreat. So the psalmist's wish was but a wish; and he, like the

rest of us, had to stand to his post, or be tied to his stake, and let enemies and storms do their worst. The LXX. has a striking reading of ver. 8, which Cheyne has partially adopted. It reads for ver. 8 *a* "waiting for Him who saves me"; but beautiful as this is, as giving the picture of the restful fugitive in patient expectation, it brings an entirely new idea into the picture, and blends metaphor and fact confusedly. The Selah at the close of ver. 7 deepens the sense of still repose by a prolonged instrumental interlude.

The second part turns from subjective feelings to objective facts. A cry for help and a yearning for a safe solitude were natural results of the former; but when the psalmist's eye turns to his enemies, a flash of anger lights it, and, instead of the meek longings of the earlier verses, prayers for their destruction are vehemently poured out. The state of things in the city corresponds to what must have been the condition of Jerusalem during the incubation of Absalom's conspiracy, but is sufficiently general to fit any time of strained party feeling. The caldron simmers, ready to boil over. The familiar evils, of which so many psalms complain, are in full vigour. The psalmist enumerates them with a wealth of words which indicates their abundance. Violence, strife, iniquity, mischief, oppression, and deceit—a goodly company to patrol the streets and fill the open places of the city! Ver. 10 *a* is sometimes taken as carrying on the personification of Violence and Strife in ver. 9, by painting these as going their rounds on the walls, like sentries; but it is better to suppose that the actual foes are meant, and that they are keeping up a strict watch to prevent the psalmist's escape.

Several commentators consider that the burst of

indignation against the psalmist's traitorous friend in vv. 12–14 interrupts the sequence, and propose rearrangements by which vv. 20, 21, will be united with vv. 12–14, and placed either before ver. 6 or after ver. 15. But the very abruptness with which the thought of the traitor is interjected here, and in the subsequent reference to him, indicates how the singer's heart was oppressed by the treason; and the return to the subject in ver. 20 is equally significant of his absorbed and pained brooding on the bitter fact. That is a slight pain which is removed by one cry. Rooted griefs, overwhelming sorrows, demand many repetitions. Trouble finds ease in tautology. It is absurd to look for cool, logical sequence in such a heart's cry as this psalm. Smooth continuity would be most unnatural. The psalmist feels that the defection of his false friend is the worst blow of all. He could have braced himself to bear an enemy's reviling; he could have found weapons to repel, or a shelter in which to escape from, open foes; but the baseness which forgets all former sweet companionship in secret, and all association in public and in worship, is more than he can bear up against. The voice of wounded love is too plain in the words for the hypothesis that the singer is the personified nation. Traitors are too common to allow of a very confident affirmation that the psalm must point to Ahithophel, and the description of the perfidious friend as the *equal* of the psalmist does not quite fit that case.

As he thinks of all the sweetness of past intimacy, turned to gall by such dastardly treachery, his anger rises. The description of the city and of the one enemy in whom all its wickedness is, as it were, concentrated, is framed in a terrible circlet of prayers

for the destruction of the foes. Ver. 9*a* begins and ver. 15 ends this part with petitions which do not breathe the spirit of "Father, forgive them." There may be a reference to the confusion of tongues at Babel in the prayer of ver. 9. As then the impious work was stopped by mutual unintelligibility, so the psalmist desires that his enemies' machinations may be paralysed in like manner. In ver. 15 the translation "desolations" follows the Hebrew text, while the alternative and in some respects preferable reading "May death come suddenly" follows the Hebrew marginal correction. There are difficulties in both, and the correction does not so much smooth the language as to be obviously an improvement. The general sense is clear, whichever reading is preferred. The psalmist is calling down destruction on his enemies; and while the fact that he is in some manner an organ of the Divine purpose invests hostility to him with the darker character of rebellion against God, and therefore modifies the personal element in the prayer, it still remains a plain instance of the lower level on which the Old Testament saints and singers stood, when compared with the "least in the kingdom of heaven."

The third part of the psalm returns to gentler tones of devotion and trust. The great name of Jehovah appears here significantly. To that ever-living One, the Covenant God, will the psalmist cry, in assurance of answer. "Evening, and morning, and noon" designate the whole day by its three principal divisions, and mean, in effect, continually. Happy are they who are impelled to unintermitting prayer by the sight of unslumbering enmity! Enemies may go their rounds "day and night," but they will do little harm, if the poor, hunted man, whom they watch so closely, lifts

his cries to Heaven "evening, and morning, and noon." The psalmist goes back to his first words. He had begun by saying that he was distracted as he mused, and could do nothing but groan, and in ver. 17 he repeats that he will still do so. Has he, then, won nothing by his prayer but the prolongation of his first dreary tone of feeling? He has won this—that his musing is not accompanied by distraction, and that his groaning is not involuntary expression of pain, but articulate prayer, and therefore accompanied by the confidence of being heard. Communion with God and prayerful trust in his help do not at once end sadness and sobbing, but do change their character and lighten the blackness of grief. This psalmist, like so many of his fellows, realises deliverance before he experiences it, and can sing "He has redeemed my soul" even while the calamity lasts. "They come not near me," says he. A soul hidden in God has an invisible defence which repels assaults. As with a man in a diving-bell, the sea may press on the crystal walls, but cannot crush them in or enter, and there is safe, dry lodging inside, while sea billows and monsters are without, close to the diver and yet far from him.

Ver. 19 is full of difficulty, and most probably has suffered some textual corruption. To "hear and answer" is uniformly an expression for gracious hearing and beneficent answering. Here it can only mean the opposite, or must be used ironically. God will hear the enemies' threats, and will requite them. Various expedients have been suggested for removing the difficulty. It has been proposed to read "me" for "them," which would bring everything into order—only that, then, the last clauses of the verse, which begin with a relative ("who have no changes," etc.), would

want an antecedent. It has been proposed to read "will humble them" for "will answer them," which is the LXX. translation. That requires a change in the vowels of the verb, and "answer" is more probable than "humble" after "hear." Cheyne follows Olshausen in supposing that "the cry of the afflicted" has dropped out after "hear." The construction of ver. 19*b* is anomalous, as the clause is introduced by a superfluous "and," which may be a copyist's error. The Selah attached is no less anomalous. It is especially difficult to explain, in view of the relative which begins the third clause, and which would otherwise be naturally brought into close connection with the "them," the objects of the verbs in *a*. These considerations lead Hupfeld to regard ver. 19 as properly ending with Selah, and the remaining clauses as out of place, and properly belonging to ver. 15 or 18; while Cheyne regards the alternative supposition that they are a fragment of another psalm as possible. There is probably some considerable corruption of the text, not now to be remedied; but the existing reading is at least capable of explanation and defence. The principal difficulty in the latter part of ver. 19 is the meaning of the word rendered "changes." The persons spoken of are those whom God will hear and answer in His judicial character, in which He has been throned from of old. Their not having "changes" is closely connected with their not fearing God. The word is elsewhere used for changes of raiment, or for the relief of military guards. Calvin and others take the changes intended to be vicissitudes of fortune, and hence draw the true thought that unbroken prosperity tends to forgetfulness of God. Others take the changes to be those of mind

or conduct from evil to good, while others fall back upon the metaphor of relieving guard, which they connect with the picture in ver. 10 of the patrols on the walls, so getting the meaning "they have no cessation in their wicked watchfulness." It must be acknowledged that none of these meanings is quite satisfactory; but probably the first, which expresses the familiar thought of the godlessness attendant on uninterrupted prosperity, is best.

Then follows another reference to the traitorous friend, which, by its very abruptness, declares how deep is the wound he has inflicted. The psalmist does not stand alone. He classes with himself those who remained faithful to him. The traitor has not yet thrown off his mask, though the psalmist has penetrated his still retained disguise. He comes with smooth words; but, in the vigorous language of ver. 21, "his heart is war." The fawning softness of words known to be false cuts into the heart, which had trusted and knows itself betrayed, more sharply than keen steel.

Ver. 22 has been singularly taken as the smooth words which cut so deep; but surely that is a very strained interpretation. Much rather does the psalmist exhort himself and all who have the same bitterness to taste, to commit themselves to Jehovah. What is it which he exhorts us to cast on Him? The word employed is used here only, and its meaning is therefore questionable. The LXX. and others translate "care." Others, relying on Talmudical usage, prefer "burden," which is appropriate to the following promise of being held erect. Others (Hupfeld, etc.) would read "that which He has given thee." The general sense is clear, and the faith expressed in both exhortation and

appended promise has been won by the singer through his prayer. He is counselling and encouraging himself. The spirit has to spur the "soul" to heroisms of faith and patience. He is declaring a universal truth. However crushing our loads of duty or of sorrow, we receive strength to carry them with straight backs, if we cast them on Jehovah. The promise is not that He will take away the pressure, but that He will hold us up under it; and, similarly, the last clause declares that the righteous will not be allowed to stumble. Faith is mentioned before righteousness. The two must go together; for trust which is not accompanied and manifested by righteousness is no true trust, and righteousness which is not grounded in trust is no stable or real righteousness.

The last verse sums up the diverse fates of the "men of blood and deceit" and of the psalmist. The terrible prayers of the middle portion of the psalm have wrought the assurance of their fulfilment, just as the cries of faith have brought the certainty of theirs. So the two closing verses of the psalm turn both parts of the earlier petitions into prophecies; and over against the trustful, righteous psalmist, standing erect and unmoved, there is set the picture of the "man of blood and deceit," chased down the black slopes to the depths of destruction by the same God whose hand holds up the man that trusts in Him. It is a dreadful contrast, and the spirit of the whole psalm is gathered into it. The last clause of all makes "I" emphatic. It expresses the final resolution which springs in the singer's heart in view of that dread picture of destruction and those assurances of support. He recoils from the edge of the pit, and eagerly opens his bosom for the promised blessing. Well for us

if the upshot of all our meditations on the painful riddle of this unintelligible world, and of all our burdens and of all our experiences and of our observation of other men's careers, is the absolute determination, "As for me, I will trust in Jehovah!"

PSALM LVI.

1 Be gracious to me, O God; for man would swallow me up:
All day the fighting oppresses me.
2 My liers-in-wait would swallow me up all the day:
For many proudly fight against me.
3 [In] the day [when] I fear,
I will trust in Thee.
4 In God do I praise His word:
In God do I trust, I will not fear;
What can flesh do to me?

5 All day they wrest my words;
All their thoughts are against me for evil.
6 They gather together, they set spies,
They mark my steps,
Even as they have waited for my soul.
7 Shall there be escape for them because of iniquity?
In anger cast down the peoples, O God.
8 My wanderings hast Thou reckoned:
Put Thou my tears into Thy bottle;
Are they not in Thy reckoning?
9 Then shall my enemies turn back in the day [when] I call.
This I know, that God is for me (*or* mine).
10 In God will I praise the word:
In Jehovah will I praise the word.
11 In God have I trusted, I will not not fear;
What can man do to me?

12 Upon me, O God, are Thy vows:
I will requite praises to Thee.
13 For Thou hast delivered my soul from death:
Hast Thou not delivered my feet from stumbling?
That I may walk before God in the light of the living.

THE superscription dates this psalm from the time of David's being in Gath. Probably his first stay there is meant, during which he had recourse to

feigned insanity in order to secure his safety. What a contrast between the seeming idiot scrabbling on the walls and the saintly singer of this lovely song of purest trust! But striking as the contrast is, it is not too violent to be possible. Such heroic faith might lie very near such employment of pardonable dissimulation, even if the two moods of feeling can scarcely have been contemporaneous. Swift transitions characterise the poetic temperament; and, alas! fluctuations of courage and faith characterise the devout soul. Nothing in the psalm specially suggests the date assigned in the superscription; but, as we have already had occasion to remark, that may be an argument for, not against, the correctness of the superscription.

The psalm is simple in structure. Like others ascribed to David during the Sauline period, it has a refrain, which divides it into two parts; but these are of substantially the same purport, with the difference that the second part enlarges the description of the enemies' assaults, and rises to confident anticipation of their defeat. In that confidence the singer adds a closing expression of thankfulness for the deliverance already realised in faith.

The first part begins with that significant contrast which is the basis of all peaceful fronting of a hostile world or any evil. On one side stands man, whose very name here suggests feebleness, and on the other is God. "Man" in ver. 1 is plainly a collective. The psalmist masses the foes, whom he afterwards individualises and knows only too well to be a multitude, under that generic appellation, which brings out their inherent frailty. Be they ever so many, still they all belong to the same class, and an infinite number of nothings only sums up into nothing. The Divine Unit

is more than all these. The enemy is said to "pant after" the psalmist, as a wild beast open-mouthed and ready to devour; or, according to others, the word means to *crush*. The thing meant by the strong metaphor is given in ver. 1 *b*. 2; namely, the continual hostile activity of the foe. The word rendered "proudly" is literally "on high," and Baethgen suggests that the literal meaning should be retained. He supposes that the antagonists "held an influential position in a princely court." Even more literally the word may describe the enemies as occupying a post of vantage, from which they shower down missiles.

One brief verse, the brevity of which gives it emphasis, tells of the singer's fears, and of how he silences them by the dead lift of effort by which he constrains himself to trust. It is a strangely shallow view which finds a contradiction in this utterance, which all hearts, that have ever won calmness in agitation and security amid encompassing dangers by the same means, know to correspond to their own experience. If there is no fear, there is little trust. The two do co-exist. The eye that takes in only visible facts on the earthly level supplies the heart with abundant reasons for fear. But it rests with ourselves whether we shall yield to those, or whether, by lifting our eyes higher and fixing the vision on the Unseen and on Him who is invisible, we shall call such an ally to our side as shall make fear and doubt impossible. We have little power of directly controlling fear or any other feeling, but we can determine the objects on which we shall fix attention. If we choose to look at "man," we shall be unreasonable if we do not fear; if we choose to look at God, we shall be more unreasonable if we do not trust. The one antagonist of fear is

faith. Trust is a voluntary action for which we are responsible.

The frequent use of the phrase "In the day when" is noticeable. It occurs in each verse of the first part, excepting the refrain. The antagonists are continually at work, and the psalmist, on his part, strives to meet their machinations and to subdue his own fears with as continuous a faith. The phrase recurs in the second part in a similar connection. Thus, then, the situation as set forth in the first part has three elements,—the busy malice of the foes; the effort of the psalmist, his only weapon against them, to hold fast his confidence; and the power and majesty of God, who will be gracious when besought. The refrain gathers up these three in a significantly different order. The preceding verses arranged them thus—God, man, the trusting singer. The refrain puts them thus—God, the trusting singer, man. When the close union between a soul and God is clearly seen and inwardly felt, the importance of the enemies dwindles. When faith is in the act of springing up, God, the refuge, and man, the source of apprehension, stand over against each other, and the suppliant, looking on both, draws near to God. But when faith has fruited, the believing soul is coupled so closely to the Divine Object of its faith, that He and it are contemplated as joined in blessed reciprocity of protection and trust, and enemies are in an outer region, where they cannot disturb its intercourse with its God. The order of thought in the refrain is also striking. First, the singer praises God's word. By God's gracious help he knows that he will receive the fulfilment of God's promises (not necessarily any special "word," such as the promise of a throne to David). And then, on the experience of

God's faithfulness thus won, is reared a further structure of trust, which completely subdues fear. This is the reward of the effort after faith which the psalmist made. He who begins with determining not to fear will get such tokens of God's troth that fear will melt away like a cloud, and he will find his sky cleared, as the nightly heavens are swept free of cloud-rack by the meek moonlight.

The second part covers the same ground. Trust, like love, never finds it grievous to write the same things. There is delight, and there is strengthening for the temper of faith, in repeating the contemplation of the earthly facts which make it necessary, and the super-sensuous facts which make it blessed. A certain expansion of the various parts of the theme, as compared with the first portion of the psalm, is obvious. Again the phrase "all the day" occurs in reference to the unwearying hostility which dogs the singer. "They wrest my words" may be, as Cheyne prefers, "They torture me with words." That rendering would supply a standing feature of the class of psalms to which this belongs. The furtive assembling, the stealthy setting of spies who watch his steps (lit. *heels*, as ready to spring on him from behind), are no new things, but are in accordance with what has long been the enemies' practice.

Ver. 7 brings in a new element not found in the first part—namely, the prayer for the destruction of these unwearied watchers. Its first clause is obscure. If the present text is adhered to, the rendering of the clause as a question is best. A suggested textual correction has been largely adopted by recent commentators, which by a very slight alteration gives the meaning "For their iniquity requite them." The

alteration, however, is not necessary, and the existing text may be retained, though the phrase is singular. The introduction of a prayer for a world-wide judgment in the midst of so intensely individual a psalm is remarkable, and favours the theory that the afflicted man of the psalm is really the nation; but it may be explained on the ground that, as in Psalm vii. 8, the judgment on behalf of one man is contemplated as only one smaller manifestation of the same judicial activity which brings about the universal judgment. This single reference to the theme which fills so considerable a part of the other psalms of this class is in harmony with the whole tone of this gem of quiet faith, which is too much occupied with the blessedness of its own trust to have many thoughts of the end of others. It passes, therefore, quickly, to dwell on yet another phase of that blessedness.

The tender words of ver. 8 need little elucidation. They have brought comfort to many, and have helped to dry many tears. How the psalmist presses close to God, and how sure he is of His gentle care and love! "Thou reckonest my wandering." The thought is remarkable, both in its realisation of God's individualising relation to the soul that trusts Him, and as in some degree favouring the Davidic authorship. The hunted fugitive feels that every step of his weary interlacing tracks, as he stole from point to point as danger dictated, was known to God. The second clause of the verse is thought by prosaic commentators to interrupt the sequence, because it interjects a petition between two statements; but surely nothing is more natural than such an "interruption." What a lovely figure is that of God's treasuring up His servants' tears in His "bottle," the skin in which

liquids were kept! What does He keep them for? To show how precious they are in His sight, and perhaps to suggest that they are preserved for a future use. The tears that His children shed and give to Him to keep cannot be tears of rebellious or unmeasured weeping, and will be given back one day to those who shed them, converted into refreshment, by the same Power which of old turned water into wine.

"Think not thou canst weep a tear,
And thy Maker is not near."

Not only in order to minister retribution to those who inflicted them, but also in order to give recompense of gladness to weepers, are these tears preserved by God; and the same idea is repeated by the other metaphor of ver. 8 *c*. God's book, or reckoning, contains the count of all the tears as well as wanderings of His servant. The certainty that it is so is expressed by the interrogative form of the clause.

The "then" of ver. 9 may be either temporal or logical. It may mean "things being so," or "in consequence of this," or it may mean "at the time when," and may refer to the further specification of period in the next clause. That same day which has already been designated as that of the enemies' panting after the psalmist's life, and wresting of his words, and, on the other hand, as that of his fear, is now the time of his prayer, and consequently of their defeat and flight. The confidence which struggled with fear in the closing words of the first part, is now consolidated into certain knowledge that God is on the singer's side, and in a very deep sense belongs to him. This is the foundation of his hope

of deliverance; and in this clear knowledge he chants once more his refrain. As is often the case, slight differences, mainly due to artistic love of variety in uniformity, occur in the repeated refrain. "Word" stands instead of "His word"; "man," instead of "flesh"; and a line is intercalated, in which Jehovah is substituted for God. The addition may be a later interpolation, but is probably part of the original text, and due to the same intelligible motives which prompted the occasional use of the great Covenant Name in the Elohistic psalms of this second book.

The psalmist's exuberant confidence overflows the limits of his song, in a closing couple of verses which are outside its scheme. So sure is he of deliverance, that, as often in similar psalms, his thoughts are busied in preparing his sacrifice of thanks before the actual advent of the mercy for which it is to be offered. Such swift-footed Gratitude is the daughter of very vivid Faith. The ground of the thankoffering is deliverance of "the soul," for which foes have "waited." "Thou hast delivered" is a perfect tense expressing confidence in the certainty of the as yet unrealised exercise of God's power. The question of ver. 13 *b*, like that of ver. 8 *c* (and perhaps that of ver. 7 *a*), is an emphatic affirmation, and the verb to be supplied is not "Wilt thou?" as the A.V. has it, but, as is plain from the context, and from the quotation of this verse in Psalm cxvi. 8, "Hast thou?" The Divine deliverance is complete,—not only doing the greater, but also the less; and not barely saving life, but sustaining the steps. God does not rescue by halves, either in the natural or spiritual realm; but in the former He first rescues and next preserves, and in the latter He delivers from the true death of the spirit, and then inspires to glad

obedience. The psalm crowns its celebration of God's miracles of deliverance by declaring the aim of them all to be that their recipient may walk before God—*i.e.*, in continual consciousness of His cognisance of his deeds, and "in the light of the living" or "of life." The expression seems here to mean simply the present life, as contrasted with the darkness and inactivity of Sheol; but we can scarcely help remembering the deeper meaning given to it by Him who said that to follow Him was to have the light of life. Whether any dim foreboding of a better light than streams from even an Eastern sun, and of a truer life than the vain shadow which men call by that august name, floated before the singer or not, we can thankfully interpret his words, so as to make them the utterance of the Christian consciousness that the ultimate design of all God's deliverances of souls from death and of feet from falling is that, not only in ways of holiness here, but in the more perfect consciousness of His greater nearness hereafter, and in correspondingly increased perfectness of active service, we should walk before God in the light of the living.

PSALM LVII

1 Be gracious to me, O God, be gracious to me;
For in Thee has my soul taken refuge:
And in the shadow of Thy wings will I take refuge,
Until the [tempest of] destructions is gone by.
2 I will cry to God Most High;
To God who accomplishes for me.
3 He will send from heaven, and save me;
[For] He that would swallow me up blasphemes. Selah.
God shall send His Loving-kindness and His Troth.
4 My soul is among lions;
I must lie down among those who breathe out fire—
Sons of men, whose teeth are spear and arrows,
Their tongue a sharp sword.
5 Exalt Thyself above the heavens, O God,
Above all the earth Thy glory.

6 A net have they prepared for my steps;
They have bowed down my soul:
They have digged before me a pit;
They have fallen into the midst of it. Selah.
7 Steadfast is my heart, O God, steadfast is my heart:
I will sing and harp.
8 Awake, my glory; awake, harp and lute:
I will wake the dawn.
9 I will give Thee thanks among the peoples, O Lord:
I will harp to Thee among the nations.
10 For great unto the heavens is Thy Loving-kindness,
And unto the clouds Thy Troth.
11 Exalt Thyself above the heavens, O God,
Above all the earth Thy glory.

THIS psalm resembles the preceding in the singer's circumstances of peril and in his bold faith. It has also points of contact in the cry, "Be gracious,"

and in the remarkable expression for enemies, "Those that would swallow me up." It has also several features in common with the other psalms ascribed by the superscriptions to the time of the Sauline persecution. Like Psalm vii. are the metaphor of *lions* for enemies, that of *digging a pit* for their plots, the use of *glory* as a synonym for soul. The difficult word rendered "destructions" in ver. 1 connects this psalm with Psalm lv. 11, dated as belonging to the time of Saul's hostility, and with Psalms v. 9 and xxxviii. 12, both traditionally Davidic. There is nothing in the psalm against the attribution of it to David in the cave, whether of Adullam or Engedi, and the allusions to lying down among lions may possibly have been suggested by the wild beasts prowling round the psalmist's shelter. The use in ver. 1 of the picturesque word for taking refuge derives special appropriateness from the circumstances of the fugitive, over whose else defenceless head the sides of his cave arched themselves like great wings, beneath which he lay safe, though the growls of beasts of prey echoed round. But there is no need to seek for further certainty as to the occasion of the psalm. Baethgen thinks that it can only have been composed after "the annihilation of the independence of the Israelite state," because the vow in ver. 9 to make God's name known among the nations can only be the utterance of the oppressed congregation, which is sure of deliverance, because it is conscious of its Divine call to sing God's praise to heathens. But that vow is equally explicable on the assumption that the individual singer was conscious of such a call.

There is no very sharp division of parts in the psalm. A grand refrain separates it into two portions, in the

former of which prayer for deliverance and contemplation of dangers prevail, while in the latter the foe is beheld as already baffled, and exuberant praise is poured forth and vowed.

As in Psalm liv. and often, the first part begins with an act of faith reaching out to God, and strengthening itself by the contemplation of His character and acts. That energy of confidence wins assurance of help, and only after that calming certitude has filled the soul does the psalmist turn his eye directly on his enemies. His faith does not make him oblivious of his danger, but it minimises his dread. An eye that has seen God sees little terror in the most terrible things.

The psalmist knows that a soul which trusts has a right to God's gracious dealings, and he is not afraid to urge his confidence as a plea with God. The boldness of the plea is not less indicative of the depth and purity of his religious experience than are the tender metaphors in which it is expressed. What truer or richer description of trust could be given than that which likens it to the act of a fugitive betaking himself to the shelter of some mountain fastness, impregnable and inaccessible? What lovelier thought of the safe, warm hiding-place which God affords was ever spoken than that of "the shadow of Thy wings"? Very significant is the recurrence of the same verb in two different tenses in two successive clauses (1 *b*, *c*). The psalmist heartens himself for present and future trust by remembrance of past days, when he exercised it and was not put to shame That faith is blessed, and cannot but be strong, which is nurtured by the remembrance of past acts of rewarded faith, as the leaves of bygone summers make rich mould for a new generation of flowers. When kites are in the sky, young birds seek

protection from the mother's wing as well as warmth from her breast. So the singer betakes himself to his shelter till "destructions are gone by." Possibly these are likened to a wild storm which sweeps across the land, but is not felt in the stillness of the cave fortress. Hidden in God, a man "heareth not the loud winds when they call," and may solace himself in the midst of their roar by the thought that they will soon blow over. He will not cease to take refuge in God when the stress is past, nor throw off his cloak when the rain ceases; but he will nestle close while it lasts, and have as his reward the clear certainty of its transiency. The faith which clings to God after the tempest is no less close than that which screened itself in Him while it raged.

Hidden in his shelter, the psalmist, in ver. 2, tells himself the grounds on which he may be sure that his cry to God will not be in vain. His name is "Most High," and His elevation is the pledge of His irresistible might. He is the "God" (the Strong) who accomplishes all for the psalmist which he needs, and His past manifestations in that character make His future interventions certain. Therefore the singer is sure of what will happen. Two bright angels—Loving-kindness and Troth or Faithfulness their names—will be despatched from heaven for the rescue of the man who has trusted. That is certain, because of what God is and has done. It is no less certain, because of what the psalmist is and has done; for a soul that gazes on God as its sole Helper, and has pressed, in its feebleness, close beneath these mighty pinions, cannot but bring down angel helpers, the executants of God's love.

The confidence expressed in ver. 2 is interrupted by an abrupt glance at the enemy. "He that would swallow me up blasphemes" is the most probable

rendering of a difficult phrase, the meaning and connection of which are both dubious. If it is so rendered, the connection is probably that which we have expressed in the translation by inserting "For." The wish to destroy the psalmist is itself blasphemy, or is accompanied with blasphemy; and therefore God will surely send down what will bring it to nought. The same identification of his own cause with God's, which marks many of the psalms ascribed to the persecuted David, underlies this sudden reference to the enemy, and warrants the conclusion drawn, that help will come. The Selah at the end of the clause is unusual in the middle of a verse; but it may be intended to underscore, as it were, the impiety of the enemy, and so corresponds with the other Selah in ver. 6, which is also in an unusual place, and points attention to the enemy's ruin, as this does to his wickedness.

The description of the psalmist's circumstances in ver. 4 presents considerable difficulty. The division of clauses, the force of the form of the verb rendered *I must lie down*, and the meaning and construction of the word rendered "those who breathe out fire," are all questionable. If the accents are adhered to, the first clause of the verse is "My soul is among lions." That is by some—*e.g.*, Delitzsch—regarded as literal description of the psalmist's environment, but it is more natural to suppose that he is applying a familiar metaphor to his enemies. In v. 4*b* the verb rendered above "I must lie down" is in a form which has usually a cohortative or optative force, and is by some supposed to have that meaning here, and to express trust which is willing to lie down even in a lion's den. It seems, however, here to denote objective necessity rather than subjective willingness. Hupfeld would read *lies down* (third

person), thus making "My soul" the subject of the verb, and getting rid of the difficult optative form. Cheyne suggests a further slight alteration in the word, so as to read, "My soul hath dwelt"—a phrase found in Psalm cxx. 6; and this emendation is tempting. The word rendered "those who breathe out fire" is by some taken to mean "those who devour," and is variously construed, as referring to the *lions* in *a*, taken literally, or as describing the *sons of men* in *c*. The general drift of the verse is clear. The psalmist is surrounded by enemies, whom he compares, as the Davidic psalms habitually do, to wild beasts. They are ready to rend. Open-mouthed they seem to breathe out flames, and their slanders cut like swords.

The psalmist's contemplation of his forlorn lair among men worse than beasts of prey drives him back to realise again his refuge in God. He, as it were, wrenches his mind round to look at God rather than at the enemies. Clear perception of peril and weakness does its best work, when it drives to as clear recognition of God's help, and wings faithful prayer. The psalmist, in his noble refrain, has passed beyond the purely personal aspect of the desired deliverance, and wishes not only that he may be shielded from his foes, but that God would, in that deliverance, manifest Himself in His elevation above and power over all created things. To conceive of his experience as thus contributing to God's world-wide glory seems presumptuous; but even apart from the consideration that the psalmist was conscious of a world-wide mission, the lowliest suppliant has a right to feel that his deliverance will enhance the lustre of that Glory; and the lowlier he feels himself, the more wonderful is its manifestations in his well-being. But if there is a strange note in the

apparent audacity of this identification, there is a deep one of self-suppression in the fading from the psalmist's prayer of all mention of himself, and the exclusive contemplation of the effects on the manifestation of God's character, which may follow his deliverance. It is a rare and lofty attainment to regard one's own well-being mainly in its connection with God's "glory," and to desire the latter more consciously and deeply than the former.

It has been proposed by Hupfeld to transpose vv. 5, 6, on the ground that a recurrence to the description of dangers is out of place after the refrain, and incongruous with the tone of the second part of the psalm. But do the psalmists observe such accuracy in the flow of their emotions? and is it not natural for a highly emotional lyric like this to allow some surge of feeling to run over its barriers? The reference to the enemies in ver. 6 is of a triumphant sort, which naturally prepares for the burst of praise following, and worthily follows even the lyrical elevation of the refrain. The perfects seem at first sight to refer to past deliverances, which the psalmist recalls in order to assure himself of future ones. But this retrospective reference is not necessary, and the whole description in ver. 6 is rather to be taken as that of approaching retribution on the foes, which is so certain to come that the singer celebrates it as already as good as done. The familiar figures of the net and pit, by both of which wild animals are caught, and the as familiar picture of the hunter trapped in his own pitfall, need no elucidation. There is a grim irony of events, which often seems to delight in showing "the engineer hoised with his own petard"; and whether that spectacle is forthcoming or not, the automatic effects of wrongdoing always follow, and no

man digs pits for others but somehow and somewhen he finds himself at the bottom of them, and his net wrapped round his own limbs. The Selah at the end of ver. 6 calls spectators to gather, as it were, round the sight of the ensnared plotter, lying helpless down there. A slight correction of the text does away with a difficulty in ver. 6 *b*. The verb there is transitive, and in the existing text is in the singular, but "He has bowed down my soul" would be awkward, though not impossible, when coming between two clauses in which the enemies are spoken of in the plural. The emendation of the verb to the third person plural by the addition of a letter brings the clauses into line, and retains the usual force of the verb.

The psalmist has done with the enemies; they are at the bottom of the pit. In full confidence of triumph and deliverance, he breaks out into a grand burst of praise. "My heart is fixed," or "steadfast." Twice the psalmist repeats this, as he does other emphatic thoughts, in this psalm (*cp.* vv. 2, 4, 8, 9). What power can steady that fluttering, wayward, agitated thing, a human heart? The way to keep light articles fixed on deck, amidst rolling seas and howling winds, is to lash them to something fixed; and the way to steady a heart is to bind it to God. Built into the Rock, the building partakes of the steadfastness of its foundation. Knit to God, a heart is firm. The psalmist's was steadfast because it had taken refuge in God; and so, even before his rescue from his enemies came to pass, he was emancipated from the fear of them, and could lift this song of praise. He had said that he must lie down among lions. But wherever his bed may be, he is sure that he will rise from it; and however dark the night, he is sure that a morning will come. In a bold and

beautiful figure he says that he will "wake the dawn" with his song.

The world-wide destination of his praise is clear to him. It is plain that such anticipations as those of ver. 9 surpass the ordinary poetic consciousness, and must be accounted for on some special ground. The favourite explanation at present is that the singer is Israel, conscious of its mission. The old explanation that the singer is a king, conscious of his inspiration and divinely given office, equally meets the case

The psalmist had declared his trust that God would send out His angels of Loving-kindness and Troth. He ends his song with the conviction, which has become to him matter of experience, that these Divine "attributes" tower to heaven, and in their height symbolise their own infinitude. Nor is the other truth suggested by ver. 10 to be passed over, that the manifestation of these attributes on earth leads to their being more gloriously visible in heaven. These two angels, who come forth from on high to do God's errands for His poor, trusting servant, go back, their work done, and are hailed as victors by the celestial inhabitants. By God's manifestation of these attributes to a man, His glory is exalted above the heavens and all the earth. The same thought is more definitely expressed in Paul's declaration that "to the principalities and powers in heavenly places is known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God."

PSALM LVIII.

1 Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O ye gods?
In uprightness do ye judge the sons of men?
2 Yea, in heart ye work iniquity;
In the earth ye weigh out the violence of your hands.
3 The wicked are estranged from the womb:
Gone astray from birth are the speakers of lies.
4 Their poison is like the poison of a serpent,
Like the deaf adder that stops its ear,
5 That will not hearken to the voice of the charmers,
The skilled weaver of spells.

6 O God, break their teeth in their mouth:
The grinders of the young lions wrench out, Jehovah.
7 Let them melt like waters [that] run themselves [dry]:
[When] he shoots his arrows, let them be as if pointless.
8 [Let them be] as a slug that dissolves as it crawls:
As the premature birth of a woman, [that] has not seen the sun.
9 Before your pots feel the thorns,
Whether it be green or burning, He shall whirl it away.

10 The righteous shall rejoice that he has beheld [the] vengeance:
His footsteps shall he bathe in the blood of the wicked.
11 And men shall say, Surely there is fruit for the righteous:
Surely there is a God judging in the earth.

THIS psalmist's fiery indignation against unjust judges and evil-doers generally is not kindled by personal wrongs. The psalm comes hot from a heart lacerated by the sight of widespread corruption, and constrained to seek for patience in the thought of the swift sweeping away of evil men before their plans are effected. Stern triumph in the punitive manifestations of God's

rule, and keen sense of the need of such, are its key-notes. Vehement emotion stirs the poet's imagination to heap together strong and, in part, obscure metaphors. Here emphatically "Indignatio facit versus." The psalm is Dantesque in its wealth of sombre imagination, which produces the most solemn effects with the homeliest metaphors, and in its awed and yet satisfied contemplation of the fate of evil-doers. It parts itself into three portions,—a dark picture of abounding evil (vv. 1–5); its punishment prayed for (vv. 6–9); and the consequent joy of the righteous and widespread recognition of the rule of a just God (vv. 10, 11).

The abrupt question of ver. 1 speaks of long pent-up indignation, excited by protracted experience of injustice, and anticipates the necessary negative answer which follows. The word rendered by the A.V. and R.V. "in silence" or "dumb" can scarcely be twisted into intelligibility, and the small alteration of reading required for the rendering "gods" is recommended by the similar expressions in the kindred Psalm lxxxii. Taken thus, the question is hurled at the appointed depositaries of judicial power and supreme authority. There is no need to suppose, with Hupfeld and others, whom Cheyne follows, that these "gods" are supernatural beings intrusted with the government of the world. The explanation of the name lies in the conception of such power as bestowed by God, and in some sense a delegation of His attribute; or, as our Lord explained the similar name in Psalm lxxxii., as given because "to them the word of God came." It sets in sinister light the flagrant contradiction between the spirit in which these men exercised their office and the source from which they derived it, and thus sharpens the reproach of the question. The answer is

introduced by a particle conveying a strong opposition to the previous supposition couched in the question. "Heart" and "hands" are so obviously antithetical, that the alteration of "in heart" to "ye all" is not acceptable, though it removes the incongruity of plans being wrought in the heart, the seat of devices, not of actions. "Work" may be here used anomalously, as we say "work out," implying the careful preparation of a plan, and there may even be a hint that the true acts are the undone acts of the heart. The unaccomplished purpose is a deed, though never clothed in outward fact. Evil determined is, in a profound sense, done before it is done; and, in another equally solemn, not done when "'tis done," as Macbeth has taught us. The "act," as men call it, follows: "In the earth"—not only in the heart—"ye weigh out the violence of your hands." The scales of justice are untrue. Instead of dispensing equity, as they were bound to do, they clash into the balance the weight of their own violence.

It is to be noted that the psalm says no more about the sins of unjust authorities, but passes on to describe the "wicked" generally. The transition may suggest that under unjust rulers all wrongdoers find impunity, and so multiply and worsen; or it may simply be that these former are now merged in the class to which they belong. The type of "wickedness" gibbeted is the familiar one of malicious calumniators and persecutors. From birth onwards they have continuously been doers of evil. The psalmist is not laying down theological propositions about heredity, but describing the inveterate habit of sin which has become a second nature, and makes amendment hopeless. The reference to "lies" naturally suggests the image of the serpent's poison. An envenomed tongue is worse than any

snake's bite. And the mention of the serpent stimulates the poet's imagination to yet another figure, which puts most graphically that disregard of warnings, entreaties, and every voice, human or Divine, that marks long-practised, customary sinfulness. There can be no more striking symbol of determined disregard to the calls of patient Love and the threats of outraged Justice than that of the snake lying coiled, with its head in the centre of its motionless folds, as if its ears were stopped by its own bulk, while the enchanter plays his softest notes and speaks his strongest spells in vain. There are such men, thinks this psalmist. There are none whom the mightiest spell, that of God's love in Christ, could not conquer and free from their poison; but there are such as will close their ears to its plaintive sweetness. This is the condemnation that light is come and men love darkness, and had rather lie coiled in their holes than have their fangs extracted.

The general drift of the second part (vv. 6–9) is to call down Divine retribution on these obstinate, irreclaimable evil-doers. Figure is heaped on figure in a fashion suggestive of intense emotion. The transiency of insolent evil, the completeness of its destruction, are the thoughts common to them all. There are difficulties in translation, and, in ver. 9, probable textual corruption; but these should not hide the tremendous power of gloomy imagination, which can lay hold of vulgar and in part loathsome things, and, by sheer force of its own solemn insight, can free them from all low or grotesque associations, and turn them into awful symbols. The intense desire for the sweeping away of evil-doers has met us in many previous psalms, and it is needless to repeat former observations on it. But it is nowhere expressed with

such a wealth of metaphor as here. The first of these, that of crushing the jaws and breaking the teeth of a beast of prey, occurs also in Psalm iii. 7. It is less terrible than the subsequent imprecations, since it only contemplates the wickeds' deprivation of power to do harm. In ver. 7 *a* their destruction is sought, while, in the second clause of the same verse, the defeat of their attempts is desired. Ver. 8 then expands the former wish, and ver. 9 the latter. This plain symmetrical arrangement makes the proposals to resort to transposition unnecessary. Mountain torrents quickly run themselves dry; and the more furious their rush, the swifter their exhaustion. They leave a chaos of whitened stones, that lie bleaching in the fierce sun when the wild spate is past. So stormy and so short will be the career of evil-doers. So could a good man of old wish it to be; and so may we be sure of and desire the cessation of oppression and man's inhumanity to man. Ver. 7 *b* is obscure. All these figures are struck out with such parsimony of words that they are difficult. They remind one of some of the stern, unfinished work of Michael Angelo, where a blow or two of his chisel, or a dash or two of his brush, has indicated rather than expressed his purpose, and left a riddle, fascinating in its incompleteness, for smaller men to spell out. In ver. 7 *b* it may be asked, Who is the archer? If God, then the whole is a presentation as if of an occurrence taking place before our eyes. God shoots His arrow, and at once it lodges in the heart of the enemies, and they are as though cut off. But it is better to take the wicked as the subject of both verbs, the change from singular to plural being by no means unusual in successive clauses with the same subject. If so, this clause recurs to the thought of

ver. 6, and prays for the neutralising of the wicked man's attempts. He fits his arrows, aims, and draws the bow. May they fall harmless, as if barbless! An emendation has been proposed by which the clause is made parallel with Psalm xxxvii. 2, "As grass let them be quickly cut off," thus securing a complete parallel with *a*, and avoiding the difficulty in the word rendered by us "pointless." But the existing text gives a vigorous metaphor, the peculiarity of which makes it preferable to the feebler image of withering grass.

The prayer for destruction is caught up again in ver. 8, in two daring figures which tremble on the verge of lowering the key of the whole; but by escaping that peril, produce the contrary effect, and heighten it. A slug leaves a shining track of slime as it creeps, which exudes from its soft body, and thus it seems to disintegrate itself by its own motion. It is the same thought of the suicidal character of bad men's efforts which was expressed by the stream foaming itself away in the nullah. It is the eternal truth that opposition to God's will destroys itself by its own activity. The unfulfilled life of a premature birth, with eyes which never opened to the light for which they were made, and possibilities which never unfolded, and which is huddled away into a nameless grave, still more impressively symbolises futility and transiency.

In ver. 9 the figure has given much trouble to commentators. Its broad meaning is, however, undoubted. It is, as ver. 6 and ver. 7 *b*, symbolic of the Divine intervention which wrecks wicked men's plans before they are wrought out. The picture before the psalmist seems to be that of a company of travellers round their camp fire, preparing their meal. They heap brushwood under the pot, and expect to satisfy their hunger;

but before the pot is warmed through, not to say before the water boils or the meat is cooked, down comes a whirlwind, which sweeps away fire, pot, and all. Every word of the clause is doubtful, and, with the existing text, the best that can be done is not wholly satisfactory. If emendation is resorted to, the suggestion of Bickell, adopted by Cheyne, gives a good sense: "[And] while your [flesh] is yet raw, the hot wrath [of Jehovah] shall sweep it away." Baethgen makes a slighter alteration, and renders, "While it is still raw, He sweeps it away in wrath." Retaining the existing text (which is witnessed by the LXX. and other old versions), probably the best rendering is, "Whether [it be] green or burning, He shall whirl it away." This general understanding of the words is shared by commentators who differ as to what is represented as swept away,—some making it the thorn fire, the twigs of which may be either full of sap or well alight; while others take the reference to be to the meat in the pot, which may be either "living," *i.e.* raw, or well on the way to being cooked. Neither application is quite free from difficulty, especially in view of the fact that some pressure has to be put on the word rendered "burning," which is not an adjective, but a noun, and is usually employed to designate the fiery wrath of God, as it is rendered in the amended text just mentioned. After all attempts at clearing up the verse, one must be content to put a mark of interrogation at any rendering. But the scope of the figure seems discoverable through the obscurity. It is a homely and therefore vigorous picture of half-accomplished plans suddenly reduced to utter failure, and leaving their concocters hungry for the satisfaction which seemed so near. The cookery may go on merrily and the thorns crackle cheerily, but

the simoom comes, topples over the tripod on which the pot swung, and blows the fire away in a hundred directions. Peter's gibbet was ready, and the morning of his execution was near; but when day dawned, "there was no small stir what was become of him." The wind had blown him away from the expectation of the people of the Jews into safe quarters; and the fire was dispersed.

The closing part (vv. 10, 11) breathes a stern spirit of joy over the destruction of the wicked. That is a terrible picture of the righteous bathing his feet in the blood of the wicked (Psalm lxviii. 23). It expresses not only the dreadful abundance of blood, but also the satisfaction of the "righteous" at its being shed. There is an ignoble and there is a noble and Christian satisfaction in even the destructive providences of God. It is not only permissible but imperative on those who would live in sympathy with His righteous dealings and with Himself, that they should see in these the manifestation of eternal justice, and should consider that they roll away burdens from earth and bring hope snd rest to the victims of oppression. It is no unworthy ahout of personal vengeance, nor of unfeeling triumph, that is lifted up from a relieved world when Babylon falls. If it is right in God to destroy, it cannot be wrong in His servants to rejoice that He does. Only they have to take heed that their emotion is untarnished by selfish gratulation, and is not untinged with solemn pity for those who were indeed doers of evil, but were themselves the greatest sufferers from their evil. It is hard, but not impossible, to take all that is expressed in the psalm, and to soften it by some effluence from the spirit of Him who wept over Jerusalem, and yet pronounced its doom.

The last issue of God's judgments contemplated by the psalm warrants the joy of the righteous; for in these there is a demonstration to the world that there is "fruit" to the righteous, and that notwithstanding all bewilderments from the sight of prosperous wickedness and oppressed righteousness "there is a God who judges in the earth." The word "judging" is here in the plural, corresponding with "God" (Elohim), which is also plural in form. Possibly the construction is to be explained on the ground that the words describe the thoughts of surrounding, polytheistic nations, who behold the exhibition of God's righteousness. But more probably the plural is here used for the sake of the contrast with the "gods" of ver. 1. Over these unworthy representatives of Divine justice sits the true judge, in the manifoldness of His attributes, exercising His righteous though slow-footed judgments.

PSALM LIX.

1 Deliver me from my enemies, O my God:
Out of the reach of those who arise against me set me on high.
2 Deliver me from workers of iniquity,
And from men of blood save me.
3 For, see, they have lain in wait for my soul,
The violent gather together against me:
Not for transgression or sin of mine, Jehovah.
4 Without [my] fault they run and set themselves in array:
Awake to meet me, and behold.
5 And Thou, Jehovah, God of hosts, God of Israel,
Rouse Thyself to visit all the nations:
Be not gracious to wicked apostates. Selah.

6 They return at evening, they snarl like dogs, and prowl round the city.
7 See, they foam at the mouth;
Swords are in their lips:
For "Who hears?"
8 But Thou, Jehovah, shalt laugh at them;
Thou mockest at all the nations.
9 My Strength, for Thee will I watch:
For God is my high tower.

10 My God shall come to meet me with His loving-kindness:
God will let me look on my adversaries.
11 Slay them not, lest my people forget:
Make them wanderers by Thy power (army?), and cast them down,
O Lord our shield.
12 [Each] word of their lips is a sin of their mouth,
And they snare themselves in their pride,
And for the cursing and lying [which] they speak.

13 End [them] in wrath, end [them], that they be no more:
And let them know that God is ruler in Jacob,
Unto the ends of the earth. Selah.

14 And they shall return at evening, they shall growl like dogs,
And prowl round the city.
15 They—they shall wander about for food,
If they are not gorged, then [so must] they pass the night
16 And I will sing Thy strength,
And sound aloud Thy loving-kindness in the morning,
For Thou hast been a high tower for me,
And a refuge in the day of my straits.
17 My strength, to Thee will I harp,
For God is my high tower, the God of my loving-kindness.

THE superscription makes this the earliest of David's psalms, dating from the Sauline persecution. It has many points of connection with the others of that group, but its closest affinities are with Psalm lv., which is commonly considered to belong to the period of incubation of Absalom's rebellion (*cf.* Psalm lv. 10 with lix 6, 14, and lv. 21 with lix. 7). The allusion to enemies patrolling the city, which is common to both psalms, seems to refer to a fact, and may in this psalm be founded on the watchfulness of Saul's emissaries; but its occurrence in both weakens its force as here confirmatory of the superscription. It does not necessarily follow from the mention of the "nations" that the psalmist's enemies are foreigners. Their presence in the city and the stress laid on words as their weapons are against that supposition. On the whole, the contents of the psalm do not negative the tradition in the title, but do not strongly attest it. If we have accepted the Davidic authorship of the other psalms of this group, we shall extend it to this one; for they clearly are a group, whether Davidic or not. The psalm falls into two principal divisions (vv 1–9 and 10–17), each closing with a refrain, and each subdivided into two

minor sections, the former of which in each case ends with Selah, and the latter begins with another refrain. The two parts travel over much the same ground of petition, description of the enemies, confidence in deliverance and in the defeat of the foes. But in the first half the psalmist prays for himself, and in the second he prays against his persecutors, while assured confidence in his own deliverance takes the place of alarmed gaze on their might and cruelty.

The former half of the first part begins and ends with petitions. Imbedded in these is a plaintive recounting of the machinations of the adversaries, which are, as it were, spread before God's eyes, accompanied with protestations of innocence. The prayers, which enclose, as in a circlet, this description of unprovoked hatred, are varied, so that the former petitions are directed to the singer's deliverance, while the latter invoke judgment on his antagonists. The strong assertion of innocence is, of course, to be limited to the psalmist's conduct to his enemies. They attack him without provocation. Obviously this feature corresponds to the facts of Saul's hatred of David, and as obviously it does not correspond to the facts of Israel's sufferings from foreign enemies, which are supposed by the present favourite interpretation to be the occasion of the psalm. No devout singer could so misunderstand the reason of the nation's disasters as to allege that they had fallen upon innocent heads. Rather, when a psalmist bewailed national calamities, he traced them to national sins. "Anger went up against Israel, because they believed not in God." The psalmist calls God to look upon the doings of his enemies. Privy plots and open assaults are both directed against him. The enemy lie in wait for his life; but also, with fell eagerness,

like that of soldiers making haste to rank themselves in battle-array, they "run and set themselves." This is probably simply metaphor, for the rest of the psalm does not seem to contemplate actual warfare. The imminence of peril forces an urgent prayer from the threatened man. So urgent is it that it breaks in on the parallelism of ver. 4, substituting its piercing cry "Awake, behold!" for the proper second clause carrying on the description in the first. The singer makes haste to grasp God's hand, because he feels the pressure of the wind blowing in his face. It is wise to break off the contemplation of enemies and dangers by crying to God. Prayer is a good interruption of a catalogue of perils. The petitions in ver. 5 are remarkable, both in their accumulation of the Divine names and in their apparent transcending of the suppliant's need. The former characteristic is no mere artificial or tautological heaping together of titles, but indicates repeated acts of faith and efforts of contemplation. Each name suggests something in God which encourages hope, and when appealed to by a trusting soul, moves Him to act. The very introductory word of invocation, "And Thou," is weighty. It sets the might of God in grand contrast to the hurrying hatred of the adversary; and its significance is enhanced if its recurrence in ver. 8 and its relation to "And I" in ver. 16 are taken into account.

The combination of the Divine names is remarkable here, from the insertion of God (Elohim) between the two parts of the standing name, Jehovah of hosts. The anomaly is made still more anomalous by the peculiar form of the word Elohim, which does not undergo the modification to be expected in such a construction. The same peculiarities occur in other Elohistic psalms (lxxx. 4, 19, and lxxxiv. 8). The

peculiar grammatical form would be explained if the three words were regarded as three co-ordinate names, Jehovah, Elohim, Zebaoth, and this explanation is favoured by good critics. But it is going too far to say, with Baethgen, that "Zebaoth *can only* be understood as an independent Divine name" (Komm., *in loc.*). Other explanations are at least possible, such as that of Delitzsch, that "Elohim, like Jehovah, has become a proper name," and so does not suffer modification. The supplicatory force of the names, however, is clear, whatever may be the account of the formal anomalies. They appeal to God and they hearten the appellant's confidence by setting forth the loftiness of God, who rules over the embattled forces of the universe, which "run and set themselves in array" at His bidding and for His servant's help, and before which the ranks of the foes seem thin and few. They set forth also God's relation to Israel, of which the single suppliant is a member.

The petition, grounded upon these names, is supposed by modern commentators to prove that the psalmist's enemies were heathens, which would, of course, destroy the Davidic authorship, and make the singer a personification of the nation. But against this is to be observed the description of the enemies in the last clause of ver. 5 as "apostates," which must refer to Israelites. The free access to the "city," spoken of in ver. 6, is also unfavourable to that supposition, as is the prominence given to the *words* of the enemy. Foreign foes would have had other swords than those carried between their lips. The prayer that Jehovah would arise to visit "all nations" is much more naturally explained, as on the same principle as the judgment of "the peoples" in Psalm vii. All special cases are subsumed under the one general judgment.

The psalmist looks for his own deliverance as one instance of that world-wide manifestation of Divine justice which will "render to every man according to his deeds." Not only personal considerations move him to his prayer; but, pressing as these are, and shrill as is the cry for personal deliverance, the psalmist is not so absorbed in self as that he cannot widen his thoughts and desires to a world-wide manifestation of Divine righteousness, of which his own escape will be a tiny part. Such recognition of the universal in the particular is the prerogative in lower walks of the poet and the man of genius; it is the strength and solace of the man who lives by faith and links all things with God. The instruments here strike in, so as to fix attention on the spectacle of God aroused to smite and of the end of apostates.

The comparison of the psalmist's enemies to dogs occurs in another psalm ascribed to David (xxii. 16, 20). They are like the masterless, gaunt, savage curs which infest the streets of Eastern cities, hungrily hunting for offal and ready to growl or snarl at every passer-by. Though the dog is not a nocturnal animal, evening would naturally be a time when these would specially prowl round the city in search of food, if disappointed during the day. The picture suggests the enemies' eagerness, lawlessness, foulness, and persistency. If the psalm is rightly dated in the superscription, it finds most accurate realisation in the crafty, cruel watchfulness of Saul's spies. The word rendered by the A.V and R.V. "make a noise" is "said usually of the growling of the bear and the cooing of the dove" (Delitzsch). It indicates a lower sound than barking, and so expresses rage suppressed lest its object should take alarm. The word rendered (A.V. and R.V.)

"belch" means to gush out, and is found in a good sense in Psalm xix. 1. Here it may perhaps be taken as meaning "foam," with some advantage to the truth of the picture. "Swords are in their lips"—*i.e.*, their talk is of slaying the psalmist, or their slanders cut like swords; and the crown of their evil is their scoff at the apparently deaf and passive God.

With startling suddenness, as if one quick touch drew aside a curtain, the vision of God as He really regards the enemies is flashed on them in ver. 8. The strong antithesis expressed by the "And Thou," as in ver. 5, comes with overwhelming force. Below is the crowd of greedy foes, obscene, cruel, and blasphemous; above, throned in dread repose, which is not, as they dream, carelessness or ignorance, is Jehovah, mocking their fancied security. The tremendous metaphor of the laughter of God is too boldly anthropomorphic to be misunderstood. It sounds like the germ of the solemn picture in Psalm ii., and is probably the source of the similar expression in Psalm xxxvii. 13. The introduction of the wider thought of God's 'mocking"—*i.e.*, discerning, and manifesting in act, the impotence of the ungodly efforts of "all nations"—is to be accounted for on the same principle of the close connection discerned by the devout singer between the particular and the general, which explains the similar extension of view in ver. 5.

Ver. 9 is the refrain closing the first part. The reading of the Hebrew text, "His strength," must be given up, as unintelligible, and the slight alteration required for reading "my" instead of "his" adopted, as in the second instance of the refrain in ver. 17. The further alteration of text, however, by which "I will harp" would be read in ver. 9 instead of "I will

watch" is unnecessary, and the variation of the two refrains is not only in accordance with usage, but brings out a delicate phase of progress in confidence. He who begins with waiting for God ends with singing praise to God. The silence of patient expectance is changed for the melody of received deliverance.

The first part of the second division, like the corresponding portion of the first division, is mainly prayer, but with the significant difference that the petitions now are directed, not to the psalmist's deliverance, but to his enemies' punishment. For himself, he is sure that his God will come to meet him with His loving-kindness, and that, thus met and helped, he will look on, secure, at their ruin. The Hebrew margin proposes to read "The God of my loving-kindness will meet me"—an incomplete sentence, which does not tell with what God will meet him. But the text needs only the change of one vowel point in order to yield the perfectly appropriate reading, "My God shall meet me with His loving-kindness," which is distinctly to be preferred. It is singular that the substitution of "my" for "his," which is needlessly suggested by the Hebrew margin for ver. 10, is required but not suggested for ver. 9. One is tempted to wonder whether there has been a scribe's blunder attaching the correction to the wrong verse. The central portion of this part of the psalm is composed of terrible wishes for the enemies' destruction. There is nothing more awful in the imprecations of the Psalter than that petition that the boon of a swift end to their miseries may not be granted them. The dew of pity for suffering is dried up by the fire of stern desire for the exhibition of a signal instance of Divine judicial righteousness. That desire lifts the prayer above the

level of personal vengeance, but does not lighten its awfulness. There may be an allusion to the fate of Cain, who was kept alive and made a "fugitive and a vagabond." Whether that is so or not, the wish that the foes may be kept alive to be buffeted by God's *strength*—or, as the word may mean, to be scattered in panic-struck rout by God's *army*—is one which marks the difference between the old and the new covenants. The ground of these fearful punishments is vehemently set forth in ver. 12. Every word which the adversaries speak is sin. Their own self-sufficient pride, which is revolt against dependence on God, is like a trap to catch them. They speak curses and lies, for which retribution is due. This recounting of their crimes, not so much against the psalmist, though involving him, as against God, fires his indignation anew, and he flames out with petitions which seem to forget the former ones for lingering destruction: "End them in wrath, end them." The contradiction may be apparent only, and this passionate cry may presuppose the fulfilment of the former. The psalmist will then desire two dreadful things—first, protracted suffering, and then a crushing blow to end it. His ultimate desire in both is the same. He would have the evil-doers spared long enough to be monuments of God's punitive justice; he would have them ended, that the crash of their fall may reverberate afar and proclaim that God rules in Jacob. "Unto the ends of the earth" may be connected either with "rules" or with "know." In the former construction the thought will be, that from His throne in Israel God exercises dominion universally; in the latter, that the echo of the judgment on these evil-doers will reach distant lands. The latter meaning is favoured by the accents, and is, on the whole, to be

preferred. But what a strange sense of his own significance for the manifestation of God's power to the world this singer must have had, if he could suppose that the events of his life were thus of universal importance! One does not wonder that the advocates of the personification theory find strong confirmation of it in such utterances; and, indeed, the only other explanation of them is that the psalmist held, and knew himself to hold, a conspicuous place in the evolution of the Divine purpose, so that in his life, as in a small mirror, there were reflected great matters. If such anticipations were more than wild dreams, the cherisher of them must either have been speaking in the person of the nation, or he must have known himself to be God's instrument for extending His name through the world. No single person so adequately meets the requirements of such words as David.

The second part of this division (ver. 14) begins with the same words as the corresponding part of the first division (ver. 6), so that there is a kind of refrain here. The futures in vv. 14, 15, may be either simple futures or optatives. In the latter case the petitions of the preceding verses would be continued here, and the pregnant truth would result that continuance in sin is the punishment of sin. But probably the imprecations are better confined to the former part, as the Selah draws a broad line of demarcation, and there would be an incongruity in following the petition "End them" with others which contemplated the continuance of the enemies. If the verses are taken as simply predictive, the point of the reintroduction of the figure of the pack of dogs hunting for their prey lies in ver. 15. There they are described as balked in their attempts, and having to pass the night unsatisfied. Their prey

has escaped. Their eager chase, their nocturnal quest, their growling and prowling, have been vain. They lie down empty and in the dark—a vivid picture, which has wider meanings than its immediate occasion. "Ye lust and desire to have, and cannot obtain." An eternal nemesis hangs over godless lives, condemning them to hunger, after all efforts, and wrapping their pangs of unsatisfied desire in tragic darkness.

A clear strain of trust springs up, like a lark's morning song. The singer contrasts himself with his baffled foes. The "they" at the beginning of ver. 15 is emphatic in the Hebrew, and is matched with the emphatic "And I" which begins ver. 16. His "morning" is similarly set over against their "night." So petition, complaint, imprecation, all merge into a song of joy and trust, and the whole ends with the refrain significantly varied and enlarged. In its first form the psalmist said, "For Thee will I watch"; in its second he rises to "To Thee will I harp." Glad praise is ever the close of the vigils of a faithful, patient heart. The deliverance won by waiting and trust should be celebrated by praise. In the first form the refrain ran "God is my high tower," and the second part of the psalm began with "My God shall meet me with His loving-kindness." In its second form the refrain draws into itself these words which had followed it, and so modifies them that the loving-kindness which in them was contemplated as belonging to and brought by God is now joyfully clasped by the singer as his very own, by Divine gift and through his own acceptance. Blessed they who are led by occasion of foes and fears to take God's rich gifts, and can thankfully and humbly feel that His loving-kindness and all its results are theirs, because He Himself is theirs and they are His!

PSALM LX.

1 O God, Thou hast cast us off, hast broken us,
Hast been angry with us—restore us again.
2 Thou hast shaken the land, hast rent it—
Heal its breaches, for it trembles.
3 Thou hast made Thy people see hard things,
Thou hast given them to drink reeling as wine.
4 Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee,
[Only] that they may flee before the bow. Selah.

5 That Thy beloved ones may be delivered,
Save with Thy right hand, and answer us.
6 God has spoken in His holiness,—I will exult:
I will divide Shechem, and measure out the valley of Succoth.
7 Mine is Gilead, and mine Manasseh,
And Ephraim is the strength of my head,
Judah, my baton of command.
8 Moab is my wash basin,
Upon Edom will I throw my shoe,
Because of me, Philistia, shout aloud.

9 Who will bring me into the fenced city?
Who has guided me into Edom?
10 Hast not Thou, O God, cast us off?
And goest not out, O God, with our hosts.
11 Give us help from the oppressor,
For vain is help of man.
12 In God we shall do prowess:
And He, He will tread down our oppressors.

THIS psalm has evidently a definite historical background. Israel has been worsted in fight, but still continues its campaign against Edom. Meditating

on God's promises, the psalmist anticipates victory, which will cover defeat and perfect partial successes, and seeks to breathe his own spirit of confidence into the ranks of his countrymen. But the circumstances answering to those required by the psalm are hard to find. The date assigned by the superscription cannot be called satisfactory; for David's war there referred to (2 Sam. viii.) had no such stunning defeats as are here lamented. The Divine Oracle, of which the substance is given in the central part of the psalm, affords but dubious indications of date. At first sight it seems to imply the union of all the tribes in one kingdom, and therefore to favour the Davidic authorship. But it may be a question whether the united Israel of the Oracle is fact or prophecy. To one school of commentators, the mention of Ephraim in conjunction with Judah is token that the psalm is prior to the great revolt; to another, it is proof positive that the date is after the destruction of the northern kingdom. The Maccabean date is favoured by Olshausen, Hitzig, and Cheyne among moderns; but, apart from other objections, the reappearance of vv. 5–12 in Psalm cviii. implies that this piece of Hebrew psalmody was already venerable when a later compiler wove part of it into that psalm. On the whole, the Davidic authorship is possible, though clogged with the difficulty already mentioned. But the safest conclusion seems to be Baethgen's modest one, which contrasts strongly with the confident assertions of some other critics—namely, that assured certainty in dating the psalm "is no longer possible."

It falls into three parts of four verses each, of which the first (vv. 1–4) is complaint of defeat and prayer for help; the second (vv. 5–8), a Divine Oracle assuring

victory; and the third (vv. 9–12), the flash of fresh hope kindled by that God's-word.

The first part blends complaint and prayer in the first pair of verses, in each of which there is, first, a description of the desperate state of Israel, and then a cry for help. The nation is broken, as a wall is broken down, or as an army whose ordered ranks are shattered and scattered. Some crushing defeat is meant, which in ver. 2 is further described as an earthquake. The land trembles, and then gapes in hideous clefts, and houses become gaunt ruins. The state is disorganised as in consequence of defeat. It is an unpoetical mixture of fact and figure to see in the "rending" of the land allusion to the separation of the kingdoms, especially as that was not the result of defeat.

There is almost a tone of wonder in the designation of Israel as "Thy people," so sadly does the fate meted out to them contrast with their name. Stranger still and more anomalous is it, that, as ver. 3 *b* laments, God's own hand has commended such a chalice to their lips as should fill them with infatuation. The construction "wine of reeling" is grammatically impossible, and the best explanation of the phrase regards the nouns as in apposition—"wine which is reeling," or "reeling as wine." The meaning is that God not only sent the disaster which had shaken the nation like an earthquake, but had sent, too, the presumptuous self-confidence which had led to it.

Ver. 4 has received two opposite interpretations, being taken by some as a prolongation of the tone of lament over disaster, and by others as commemoration of God's help. The latter meaning violently interrupts the continuity of thought. "The only natural view is that

which sees" in ver. 4 "a continuation of the description of calamity" in ver. 3 (Cheyne, *in loc.*). Taking this view, we render the second clause as above. The word translated "that they may flee" may indeed mean to lift themselves up, in the sense of gathering round a standard, but the remainder of the clause cannot be taken as meaning "because of the truth," since the preposition here used never means "because of." It is best taken here as *from before.* The word variously rendered *bow* and *truth* is difficult. It occurs again in Prov. xxii. 21, and is there parallel with "truth" or faithfulness in fulfilling Divine promises. But that meaning would be inappropriate here, and would require the preceding preposition to be taken in the impossible sense already noted. It seems better, therefore, to follow the LXX. and other old versions, in regarding the word as a slightly varied mode of spelling the ordinary word for a bow (the final dental letter being exchanged for a cognate dental). The resulting meaning is deeply coloured by sad irony. "Thou hast indeed given a banner—but it was a signal for flight rather than for gathering round." Such seems the best view of this difficult verse; but it is not free from objection. "Those who fear Thee" is not a fitting designation for persons who were thus scattered in flight by God, even if it is taken as simply a synonym for the nation. We have to make choice between two incongruities. If we adopt the favourite view, that the verse continues the description of calamity, the name given to the sufferers is strange. If we take the other, that it describes God's gracious rallying of the fugitives, we are confronted with a violent interruption of the tone of feeling in this first part of the psalm. Perowne accepts the rendering *from before*

the bow, but takes the verb in the sense of mustering round, so making the banner to be a rallying-point, and the giving of it a Divine mercy.

The second part (vv. 5–8) begins with a verse which Delitzsch and others regard as really connected, notwithstanding the Selah at the end ver. 4, with the preceding. But it is quite intelligible as independent, and is in its place as the introduction to the Divine Oracle which follows, and makes the kernel of the psalm. There is beautiful strength of confidence in the psalmist's regarding the beaten, scattered people as still God's "darlings." He appeals to Him to answer, in order that a result so accordant with God's heart as the deliverance of His beloved ones may be secured. And the prayer has no sooner passed his lips than he hears the thunderous response, "God has spoken in His holiness." That infinite elevation of His nature above creatures is the pledge of the fulfilment of His word.

The following verses contain the substance of the Oracle; but it is too daring to suppose that they reproduce its words; for "I will exult" can scarcely be reverently put into the mouth of God. The substance of the whole is a twofold promise—of a united Israel, and a submissive heathendom. Shechem on the west and Succoth on the east of Jordan, Gilead and Manasseh on the east, and Ephraim and Judah on the west, are the possession of the speaker, whether he is king or representative of the nation. No trace of a separation of the kingdoms is here. Ephraim, the strongest tribe of the northern kingdom, is the "strength of my head," the helmet, or perhaps with allusion to the horns of an animal as symbols of offensive weapons. Judah is the ruling tribe, the commander's baton, or

possibly "lawgiver," as in Gen. xlix. Israel thus compact together may count on conquests over hereditary foes.

Their defeat is foretold in contemptuous images. The basin for washing the feet was "a vessel unto dishonour"; and, in Israel's great house, no higher function for his ancestral enemy, when conquered, would be found. The meaning of casting the shoe upon or over Edom is doubtful. It may be a symbol for taking possession of property, though that lacks confirmation; or Edom may be regarded as the household slave to whom the master's shoes are thrown when taken off; or, better, in accordance with the preceding reference to Moab, Edom may be regarded as part of the master's house or furniture. The one was the basin for his feet; the other, the corner where he kept his sandals.

If the text of ver. 8*c* is correct, Philistia is addressed with bitter sarcasm, and bidden to repeat her ancient shouts of triumph over Israel now, if she can. But the edition of these verses in Psalm cviii. gives a more natural reading, which may be adopted here: "Over Philistia will I shout aloud."

The third part (vv. 9–12) is taken by some commentators to breathe the same spirit as the first part. Cheyne, for instance, speaks of it as a "relapse into despondency," whilst others more truly hear in it the tones of rekindled trust. In ver. 9 there is a remarkable change of tense from "Who will bring?" in the first clause, to "Who has guided?" in the second. This is best explained by the supposition that some victory over Edom had preceded the psalm, which is regarded by the singer as a guarantee of success in his assault of "the fenced city," probably Petra.

There is no need to supplement ver. 10, so as to read, "Wilt not Thou, O God, which," etc. The psalmist recurs to his earlier lament, not as if he thought that it still held true, but just because it does not. It explained the reason of past disasters; and, being now reversed by the Divine Oracle, becomes the basis of the prayer which follows. It is as if he had said, "We were defeated because Thou didst cast us off. Now help as Thou hast promised, and we shall do deeds of valour." It is impossible to suppose that the result of the Divine answer which makes the very heart of the psalm, should be a hopeless repetition of the initial despondency. Rather glad faith acknowledges past weakness and traces past failures to self-caused abandonment by a loving God, who let His people be worsted that they might learn who was their strength, and ever goes forth with those who go forth to war with the consciousness that all help but His is vain, and with the hope that in Him even their weakness shall do deeds of prowess. "Hast not Thou cast us off?" may be the utterance of despair; but it may also be that of assured confidence, and the basis of a prayer that will be answered by God's present help.

PSALM LXI.

1 Hear, O God, my shrill cry,
Attend to my prayer.

2 From the end of the earth I cry to Thee, when my heart is
wrapped [in gloom]:
Lead me on to a rock that is too high for me to [reach]
3 For Thou hast been a place of refuge for me,
A tower of strength from the face of the foe.
4 Let me dwell a guest in Thy tent for ever,
Let me find refuge in the covert of Thy wings. Selah.
5 For Thou, O God, hast hearkened to my vows,
Thou hast given [me] the heritage of them that fear Thy name.

6 Days mayest Thou add to the days of the king,
May his years be as many generations.
7 May he sit before God for ever:
Give charge to loving-kindness and troth, that they guard him.

8 So will I harp to Thy name for aye,
That I may fulfil my vows day by day.

THE situation of the singer in this psalm is the same as in Psalm lxiii. In both he is an exile longing for the sanctuary, and in both "the king" is referred to in a way which leaves his identity with the psalmist questionable. There are also similarities in situation, sentiment, and expression with Psalms xlii. and xliii.—*e.g.*, the singer's exile, his yearning to appear in the sanctuary, the command given by God to His Loving-kindness (xlii. 8 and lxi. 8), the personification of Light and Troth as his guides (xliii. 3), compared

with the similar representation here of Loving-kindness and Troth as guards set by God over the psalmist. The traditional attribution of the psalm to David has at least the merit of providing an appropriate setting for its longings and hopes, in his flight from Absalom. No one of the other dates proposed by various critics seems to satisfy anybody but its proposer. Hupfeld calls Hitzig's suggestion "wunderbar zu lesen." Graetz inclines to the reign of Hezekiah, and thinks that "the connection gains" if the prayer for the preservation of the king's life refers to that monarch's sickness. The Babylonish captivity, with Zedekiah for "the king," is preferred by others. Still later dates are in favour now. Cheyne lays it down that "pre-Jeremian such highly spiritual hymns (*i.e.*, Psalms lxi. and lxiii.) obviously cannot be," and thinks that "it would not be unplausible to make them contemporaneous with Psalm xlii., the king being Antiochus the Great," but prefers to assign them to the Maccabean period, and to take "Jonathan, or (better) Simon" as the king. Are "highly spiritual hymns" probable products of that time?

If the Selah is accepted as marking the end of the first part of the psalm, its structure is symmetrical, so far as it is then divided into two parts of four verses each; but that division cuts off the prayer in ver. 4 from its ground in ver. 5. Selah frequently occurs in the middle of a period, and is used to mark emphasis, but not necessarily division. It is therefore better to keep vv. 4 and 5 together, thus preserving their analogy with vv. 2 and 3. The scheme of this little psalm will then be an introductory verse, followed by two parallel pairs of verses, each consisting of petition and its grounding in past mercies (vv. 2, 3, and 4, 5), and

these again succeeded by another pair containing petitions for "the king," while a final single verse, corresponding to the introductory one, joyfully foresees life-long praise evoked by the certain answers to the singer's prayer.

The fervour of the psalmist's supplication is strikingly expressed by his use in the first clause, of the word which is ordinarily employed for the shrill notes of rejoicing. It describes the quality of the sound as penetrating and emotional, not the nature of the emotion expressed by it. Joy is usually louder-tongued than sorrow; but this suppliant's need has risen so high that his cry is resonant. To himself he seems to be at "the end of the earth"; for he measures distance not as a map-maker, but as a worshipper. Love and longing are potent magnifiers of space. His heart "faints," or is "overwhelmed." The word means literally "covered," and perhaps the metaphor may be preserved by some such phrase as *wrapped in gloom*. He is, then, an exile, and therefore sunk in sadness. But while he had external separation from the sanctuary chiefly in view, his cry wakes an echo in all devout hearts. They who know most about the inner life of communion with God best know how long and dreary the smallest separation between Him and them seems, and how thick is the covering spread over the heart thereby.

The one desire of such a suppliant is for restoration of interrupted access to God. The psalmist embodies that yearning in its more outward form, but not without penetrating to the inner reality in both the parallel petitions which follow. In the first of these, (ver. 2 *b*) the thought is fuller than the condensed expression of it. "Lead me on" or in, says he, meaning, Lead me *to* and set me *on*. His imagination sees

towering above him a great cliff, on which, if he could be planted, he might defy pursuit or assault. But he is distant from it, and the inaccessibility which, were he in its clefts, would be his safety, is now his despair. Therefore he turns to God and asks Him to bear him up in His hands, that he may set his foot on that rock. The figure has been, strangely enough, interpreted to mean a rock of difficulty, but against the usage in the Psalter. But we do not reach the whole significance of the figure if we give it the mere general meaning of a place of safety. While it would be too much to say that "rock" is here an epithet of God (the absence of the definite article and other considerations are against that), it may be affirmed that the psalmist, like all devout men, knew that his only place of safety was in God. "*A* rock" will not afford adequate shelter; our perils and storms need "*the* Rock." And, therefore, this singer bases his prayer on his past experience of the safe hiding that he had found in God. "Place of refuge" and "strong tower" are distinctly parallel with "rock." The whole, then, is like the prayer in Psalm xxxi. 2, 3: "Be Thou to me a strong rock. For Thou art my rock."

The second pair of verses, containing petition and its ground in past experience (vv. 4, 5), brings out still more clearly the psalmist's longing for the sanctuary. The futures in ver. 4 may be taken either as simple expressions of certainty, or, more probably, as precative, as is suggested by the parallelism with the preceding pair. The "tent" of God is the sanctuary, possibly so called because at the date of the psalm "the ark of God dwelt in curtains." The "hiding-place of Thy wings" may then be an allusion to the Shechinah and outspread pinions of the Cherubim. But the inner reality is more

to the psalmist than the external symbols, however his faith was trained to connect the two more indissolubly than is legitimate for us. His longing was no superstitious wish to be near that sanctuary, as if external presence brought blessing, but a reasonable longing, grounded on the fact for his stage of revelation, that such presence was the condition of fullest realisation of spiritual communion, and of the safety and blessedness thence received. His prayer is the deepest desire of every soul that has rightly apprehended the facts of life, its own needs and the riches of God. The guests in God's dwelling have guest-rights of provision and protection. Beneath His wings are safety, warmth, and conscious nearness to His heart. The suppliant may feel far off, at the end of the world; but one strong desire has power to traverse all the distance in a moment. "Where the treasure is, there will the heart be also"; and where the heart is, there the man is.

The ground of this second petition is laid in God's past listening to vows, and His having given the psalmist "the heritage of those that fear Thy name." That is most naturally explained as meaning primarily the land of Israel, and as including therein all other blessings needful for life there. While it is capable of being otherwise understood, it is singularly appropriate to the person of David during the period of Absalom's rebellion, when victory was beginning to declare itself for the king. If we suppose that he had already won a battle (2 Sam. xviii. 6), we can understand how he takes that success as an omen and urges it as a plea. The pair of verses will then be one instance of the familiar argument which trustful hearts instinctively use, when they present past and incomplete mercies as reasons for continued gifts, and for the

addition of all which is needed to "perfect that which concerneth" them. It rests on the confidence that God is not one who "begins and is not able to finish."

Very naturally, then, follows the closing prayer in vv. 6, 7. The purely individual character of the rest of the psalm, which is resumed in the last verse, where the singer, speaking in the first person, reprseents his continual praise as the result of the answer to his petitions for the king, makes these petitions hopelessly irrelevant, unless the psalmist is the king and these prayers are for himself. The transition to the third person does not necessarily negative this interpretation, which seems to be required by the context. The prayer sounds hyperbolical, but has a parallel in Psalm xxi. 4, and need not be vindicated by taking the dynasty rather than the individual to be meant, or by diverting it to a Messianic reference. It is a prayer for length of days, in order that the deliverance already begun may be perfected, and that the psalmist may dwell in the house of the Lord for ever (*cf.* Psalms xxiii 6; xxvii. 4). He asks that he may sit enthroned before God for ever—that is, that his dominion may by God's favour be established and his throne upheld in peace The psalm is in so far Messianic that the everlasting kingdom of the Christ alone fulfils its prayer.

The final petition has, as has been noticed above, parallels in Psalms xlii., xliii., to which may be added the personifications of Goodness and Loving-kindness in Psalm xxiii. 6. These bright harnessed angels stand sentries over the devout suppliant, set on their guard by the great Commander; and no harm can come to him over whom God's Loving-kindness and Faithfulness keep daily and nightly watch.

Thus guarded, the psalmist's prolonged life will be

one long anthem of praise, and the days added to his days will be occupied with the fulfilment of his vows made in trouble and redeemed in his prosperity. What congruity is there between this closing verse, which is knit closely to the preceding by that "So," and the previous pair of verses, unless the king is himself the petitioner? "Let *him* sit before God for ever"—how comes that to lead up to "So will *I* harp to Thy name for ever"? Surely the natural answer is, Because "he" and "I" are the same person.

PSALM LXII.

1 Only upon God [waits] my soul [in] silence!
From Him is my salvation.
2 Only He is my rock and my salvation,
My high tower, I shall not be greatly moved.
3 How long will ye rush upon a man?
[How long] will ye all of you break him down,
Like a bulging wall, a tottering fence?
4 Only from his elevation do they consult to thrust him down, they delight in lies:
Each blesses with his mouth, and in their inner [part] they curse. Selah.

5 Only to God be silent, my soul,
For from Him is my expectation.
6 Only He is my rock and my salvation,
My high tower; I shall not be moved.
7 On God is my salvation and my glory,
The rock of my strength, my refuge, is in God.
8 Trust in him in every time, O people!
Pour out before Him your heart,
God is a refuge for us. Selah.

9 Only vanity are the sons of the lowly, a lie are the sons of the lofty,
In the scales they go up, they are [lighter] than vanity altogether.
10 Trust not in oppressions and in robbery become not vain,
When wealth grows, set not your heart thereon.
11 Once has God spoken, twice have I heard this,
That strength [belongs] to God.
12 And to Thee, O God, [belongs] loving-kindness,
For Thou, Thou renderest to a man according to his work.

THERE are several points of affinity between this psalm and the thirty-ninth,—such as the frequent use of the particle of asseveration or restriction ("surely"

or "only"); the rare and beautiful word for "silence," as expressing restful, still resignation; and the characterisation of men as "vanity." These resemblances are not proofs of identity of authorship, though establishing a presumption in its favour. Delitzsch accepts the psalm as Davidic, and refers it to the time of Absalom's revolt. The singer is evidently in a position of dignity ("elevation," ver. 4), and one whose exhortations come with force to the "people" (ver. 8), whether that word is understood as designating the nation or his immediate followers. Cheyne, who relegates the psalm to the Persian period, feels that the recognition of the singer as "a personage who is the Church's bulwark" is the natural impression on reading the psalm ("Orig. o Psalt.," 227, and 242, *n.*). If so, David's position is precisely that which is required. Whoever sang this immortal psalm, rose to the heights of conquering faith, and gave voice to the deepest and most permanent emotions of devout souls.

The psalm is in three strophes of four verses each, the divisions being marked by Selah. The two former have a long refrain at the beginning, instead of, as usually, at the end. In the first the psalmist sets his quiet trust in contrast with the furious assaults of his foes; while, in the second, he stirs himself to renewed exercise of it, and exhorts others to share with him in the security of God as a place of refuge. In the third strophe the nothingness of man is set in strong contrast to the power and loving-kindness of God, and the dehortation from trust in material wealth urged as the negative side of the previous exhortation to trust in God.

The noble saying of ver. 1 *a* is hard to translate without weakening. The initial word may have the

meanings of "Only" or "Surely." The former seems more appropriate in this psalm, where it occurs six times, in one only of which (ver. 4) does the latter seem the more natural rendering, though even there the other is possible. It is, however, to be noticed that its restrictive power is not always directed to the adjacent word; and here it may either present God as the exclusive object of the psalmist's waiting trust, or his whole soul as being nothing else but silent resignation. The reference to God is favoured by ver. 2, but the other is possible. The psalmist's whole being is, as it were, but one stillness of submission. The noises of contending desires, the whispers of earthly hopes, the mutterings of short-sighted fears, the self-asserting accents of an insisting will, are hushed, and all his nature waits mutely for God's voice. No wonder that a psalm which begins thus should end with "God hath spoken once, twice have I heard this"; for such waiting is never in vain. The soul that cleaves to God is still; and, being still, is capable of hearing the Divine whispers which deepen the silence which they bless. "There is no joy but calm"; and the secret of calm is to turn the current of the being to God. Then it is like a sea at rest.

The psalmist's silence finds voice, which does not break it, in saying over to himself what God is to him. His accumulation of epithets reminds us of Psalm xviii. 1, 2. Not only does his salvation come from God, but God Himself is the salvation which He sends forth like an angel. The recognition of God as his defence is the ground of "silence"; for if He is "my rock and my salvation," what can be wiser than to keep close to Him, and let Him do as He will? The assurance of personal safety is inseparable from such a thought of God.

Nothing which does not shake the rock can shake the frail tent pitched on it. As long as the tower stands, its inhabitant can look down from his inaccessible fastness with equanimity, though assailed by crowds. Thus the psalmist turns swiftly, in the latter pair of verses making up the first strophe, to address remonstrances to his enemies, as engaged in a useless effort, and then drops direct address and speaks *of* their hostility and treachery. The precise meaning of parts of ver. 3 has been misapprehended, by reason of the peculiarities of some of the words and the condensed character of the imagery in *b*, *c*. The rendering above is substantially that generally accepted now. It sets in striking contrast the single figure of the psalmist and the multitude of his assailants. "All of you" rush upon a man like a pack of hounds on one defenceless creature, and try to break him down, as men put their shoulders to a wall in order to overthrow it. The partial success of the assault is hinted in the epithets applied to wall and fence, which are painted as beginning to give under pressure. Language of confidence sounds strangely in such circumstances. But the toppling wall, with all these strong men pushing at it, will "not be greatly moved." The assailants might answer the psalmist's "How long?" with defiant confidence that a short time only was needed to complete the begun ruin; but he, firm in his faith, though tottering in his fortunes, knows better, and, in effect, tells them by his question that, however long they may press against his feebleness, they will never overthrow him. The bulging wall outlasts its would-be destroyers. But appeal to them is vain; for they have one settled purpose absorbing them—namely, to cast him down from his height. He is, then, probably in some position of distinction,

threatened by false friends, who are plotting his deposition, while their words are fair. All these circumstances agree well with the Davidic authorship.

The second strophe reiterates the refrain, with slight but significant variations, and substitutes for the address to and contemplation of the plotters a meditation on the psalmist's own security, and an invitation to others to share it. In ver. 5 the refrain is changed from a declaration of the psalmist's silent waiting to self-exhortation thereto. Cheyne would assimilate the two verses by making both verbs imperatives; but that change destroys the beautiful play of feeling, so true to experience, which passes from consciousness of one's attitude towards God to effort at preserving it. No emotions, however blessed, deep, and real, will last, unless perpetually renewed. Like carbon points in electric lights, they burn away as they burn, and the light dies, unless there is some impulse which presses a fresh surface forward to receive the fiery kiss that changes its blackness into radiance. The "expectation" in ver. 5 *b* is substantially equivalent to the "salvation" in ver. 1 *b*. It means not the emotion (which could not be said to be "from Him"), but the thing expected, just as "hope" is used for the *res sperata*. The change in expression from "salvation" to "expectation" makes prominent the psalmist's attitude. In his silence his wistful eyes look up, watching for the first far-off brightening which tells him that help is on its road from the throne. Salvation will not come unexpected, and expectation will not look for succours in vain.

There may be deep meaning in the slight omission of "greatly" in the second refrain. Confidence has grown. The first hope was that the waiting heart

should not be much shaken, that the tottering fence should not be quite thrown down; the second is that it shall not be shaken at all. An access of faith has poured into the singer's soul with his song; and now he has no thought of the crowd of assailants, who have faded from his sight because he is gazing on God. Hence the second pair of verses in this strophe (vv. 7, 8) substitutes for the description of their fierce rush the triumphant reiteration of what God is to the psalmist, and an invitation to others to come with him into that strong refuge. The transition to addressing the "people" is natural, if the psalm is David's. The phrase would then apply to his immediate followers, who were one with him in peril, and whom he would fain have one with him in trust. But the LXX. has another reading, which involves only the insertion of a letter, that may easily have dropped out, in the word rendered "time," and which makes the verse run more smoothly. It reads "all the congregation of the people," in which it is followed by Baethgen, Cheyne, and others. Whoever the psalmist was, he felt the impulse which follows all deep experience of the security that comes from hiding in God—namely, the longing to beckon in others out of the storm into peace. Every man who has learned that God is a refuge for him is thereby assured that He is the same for all men, and thereby moved to beseech them to make the like blessed discovery. The way into that hiding-place is trust. "Pour out before Him your heart," says the psalmist. "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God," says Paul. They both mean the same thing. We take refuge in our refuge when we set our faith on God, and tell Him all that threatens or troubles us.

When we do, we are no longer in the open, defenceless before the rush of enemies, but housed in God, or, as Paul puts it, guarded in Christ Jesus, as in a fortress. No wonder that the psalm pauses for a moment on that thought, and lets the notes of harp and horn impress it on the listeners!

The third strophe sets the emptiness of men in strong contrast to the sufficiency of God. "Vanity" is literally "a breath," and would better be so rendered in ver. 9, but for the recurrence of the verb from the same root in ver. 10, which requires the rendering "be not vain." It is desirable to preserve identity of translation, so as to retain the play of words. But by doing so ver. 9 is somewhat weakened. The eyes that have been looking on God are cleared to see the shadowy nothingness of men of all degrees. The differences of high and low dwindle when seen from that "high tower," as lower lands appear flat when viewed from a mountain top. They are but "breath," so fleeting, unsubstantial are they. They are a "lie," in so far as hopes directed to them are deceived and trust misplaced. The singer is not cynically proclaiming man's worthlessness, but asserting his insufficiency as the object of man's trust. His point of view is different from that of Psalm xxxix., though his words are the same. The "Only" which begins ver. 9 carries us back to the similar beginning of the preceding strophes, and brings out the true force of the following words, by suggesting the contrast between men and the God on whom the psalmist's soul waits in silence. That contrast may be further continued in ver. 9 *b*. The lowly and the lofty are in one scale. What is in the other, the solid weight of which sends them aloft as lighter? Is it pressing the metaphor too far to suppose that the

psalmist is weighing the whole mass of men against God only? Heap them altogether and balance them against Him, and the gathered mass does not weigh as much as an imponderable breath. Who could trust in that emptiness when he has God to trust in? Who would grasp shadows when he may cling to that eternal Substance?

The natural conclusion from ver. 9 follows in the exhortation of ver. 10, which completes the positive presentation of the true object of trust (ver. 8) by the warning against false refuges. The introduction of "oppression" and "robbery" is singular, for it can scarcely be supposed that the assailants of the psalmist are here addressed, and still less that his followers needed to be warned against these crimes. Cheyne, therefore, follows Graetz and others in reading "perverseness" for "oppression," and "crookedness" for "robbery"; but the alteration throws the clause out of harmony with the next clause. It may be that in ver. 10 *a* the psalmist has in view unjust gain and in *b* justly acquired wealth, and that thus his two dehortations cover the whole ground of material riches, as if he had said, "Whether rightly or wrongly won, they are wrongly used if they are trusted in." The folly and misery of such trust are vigorously set forth by that word "become vain." The curse of misplaced confidence is that it brings down a man to the level of what he trusts in, as the blessing of wisely placed trust is that it lifts him to that level. Trust in vanity is vain, and makes the truster "vanity." Wind is not a nourishing diet. It may inflate, or, as Paul says about knowledge, may "puff up," but not "build up." Men are assimilated to the objects of their trust; and if these are empty, "so is every one that trusteth in them."

So far the psalmist has spoken. But his silent waiting has been rewarded with a clear voice from heaven, confirming that of his faith. It is most natural to regard the double revelation received by the psalmist as repeated in the following proclamation of the two great aspects of the Divine nature—Power and Loving-kindness. The psalmist has learned that these two are not opposed nor separate, but blend harmoniously in God's nature, and are confluent in all His works. Power is softened and directed by Loving-kindness. Loving-kindness has as its instrument Omnipotence. The synthesis of these two is in the God whom men are invited to trust; and such trust can never be disappointed; for His Power and His Loving-kindness will co-operate to "render to a man according to his work." The last word of the psalm adds the conception of Righteousness to those of Power and Loving-kindness. But the psalmist seems to have in view mainly one direction in which that rendering "to a man according to his work" is active—namely, in answering the trust which turns away from human power which is weakness, and from human love which may change and must die, to anchor itself on the might and tenderness of God. Such "work of faith" will not be in vain; for these twin attributes of Power and Love are pledged to requite it with security and peace.

PSALM LXIII.

1 O God, my God art Thou, I seek Thee earnestly,
My soul thirsts for Thee, my flesh pines for Thee,
In a dry and weary land, without water.
2 So in the sanctuary have I gazed on Thee,
To see Thy power and Thy glory.
3 For Thy loving-kindness is better than life,
[Therefore] my lips shall praise Thee.
4 So will I bless Thee while I live,
In Thy name will I lift my hands.

5 As [with] fat and marrow shall my soul be satisfied,
And with lips that joyfully shout shall my mouth praise Thee,
6 When I remember Thee on my bed,
Through the watches [of the night] do I meditate on Thee.
7 For Thou hast been a help for me,
And in the shadow of Thy wings will I shout for joy.

8 My soul cleaves [to and presses] after Thee,
Me does Thy right hand uphold.
9 But these—for its destruction they seek my soul;
They shall go into the undermost parts of the earth.
10 They shall be given over to the power of the sword,
The portion of jackals shall they be.
11 But the king shall rejoice in God,
Every one that swears by Him shall glory,
For the mouth of them that speak a lie shall be stopped.

IF the psalmist is allowed to speak, he gives many details of his circumstances in his song. He is in a waterless and weary land, excluded from the sanctuary, followed by enemies seeking his life. He expects a fight, in which they are to fall by the sword, and appa-

rently their defeat is to lead to his restoration to his kingdom.

These characteristics converge on David. Cheyne has endeavoured to show that they fit the faithful Jews in the Maccabean period, and that the "king" in ver. 2 is "Jonathan or [better] Simon" ("Orig. of Psalt.," 99, and "Aids to Dev. Study of Crit.," 308 *seqq.*). But unless we are prepared to accept the dictum that "Pre-Jeremian such highly spiritual hymns obviously cannot be" (*u.s.*), the balance of probability will be heavily in favour of the Davidic origin.

The recurrence of the expression "My soul" in vv. 1, 5, 8, suggests the divisions into which the psalm falls. Following that clue, we recognise three parts, in each of which a separate phase of the experience of the soul in its communion with God is presented as realised in sequence by the psalmist. The soul longs and thirsts for God (vv. 1–4). The longing soul is satisfied in God (vv. 5–7). The satisfied soul cleaves to and presses after God (vv. 8–11). These stages melt into each other in the psalm as in experience, but are still discernible.

In the first strophe the psalmist gives expression in immortal words to his longing after God. Like many a sad singer before and after him, he finds in the dreary scene around an image of yet drearier experiences within. He sees his own mood reflected in the grey monotony of the sterile desert, stretching waterless on every side, and seamed with cracks, like mouths gaping for the rain that does not come. He is weary and thirsty; but a more agonising craving is in his spirit, and wastes his flesh. As in the kindred Psalms xlii., xliii., his separation from the sanctuary has dimmed his sight of God. He longs for the return of that vision

in its former clearness. But even while he thirsts, he in some measure possesses, since his resolve to "seek earnestly" is based on the assurance that God is his God. In the region of the devout life the paradox is true that we long precisely because we have. Every soul is athirst for God; but unless a man can say, "Thou art my God," he knows not how to interpret nor where to slake his thirst, and seeks, not after the living Fountain of waters, but after muddy pools and broken cisterns.

Ver. 2 is difficult principally because the reference of the initial "So" is doubtful. By some it is connected with the first clause of ver. 1: "So"—*i.e.*, as my God—"have I seen Thee." Others suppose a comparison to be made between the longing just expressed and former ones, and the sense to be, "With the same eager desire as now I feel in the desert have I gazed in the sanctuary." This seems the better view. Hupfeld proposes to transpose the two clauses, as the A.V. has done in its rendering, and thus gets a smoother run of thought. The immediate object of the psalmist's desire is thus declared to be "to behold Thy power and glory," and the "So" is substantially equivalent to "According as." If we retain the textual order of the clauses, and understand the first as paralleling the psalmist's desert longing with that which he felt in the sanctuary, the second clause will state the aim of the ardent gaze—namely, to "behold Thy power and Thy glory." These attributes were peculiarly manifested amid the imposing sanctities where the light of the Shechinah, which was especially designated as "the Glory," shone above the ark.

The first clause of ver. 3 is closely connected with the preceding, and gives the reason for some part of the emotion there expressed, as the introductory "For"

shows. But it is a question to which part of the foregoing verses it refers. It is probably best taken as assigning the reason for their main subject—namely, the psalmist's thirst after God. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Our desires are shaped by our judgments of what is good. The conviction of God's transcendent excellence and absolute sufficiency for all our cravings must precede the direction of these to Him. Unless all enjoyments and possessions, which become ours through our corporeal life, and that life itself, are steadfastly discerned to be but a feather's weight in comparison with the pure gold of God's loving-kindness, we shall not long for it more than for them.

The deep desires of this psalmist were occasioned by his seclusion from outward forms of worship, which were to him so intimately related to the inward reality, that he felt farther away from God in the wilderness than when he caught glimpses of His face, through the power and glory which he saw visibly manifested in the sanctuary. But in his isolation he learns to equate his desert yearnings with his sanctuary contemplations, and thus glides from longing to fruition. His devotion, nourished by forms, is seen in the psalm in the very act of passing on to independence of form; and so springs break out for him in the desert. His passion of yearning after God rebukes and shames our faint desires. This man's soul was all on the stretch to grasp and hold God. His very physical frame was affected by his intense longing. If he did not long too much, most men, even those who thirst after God most, long terribly too little. Strong desire has a joy in its very aching; feeble desire only makes men restless and uncomfortable. Nothing can be more preposterous than tepid aspirations after the greatest and only good.

To hold as creed that God's loving-kindness is better than life, and to wish a little to possess it, is surely irrational, if anything is so.

The remaining clauses of ver. 3 and ver. 4 form a transition to the full consciousness of satisfaction which animates the psalmist in the second part. The resolve to praise, and the assurance that he will have occasion to praise, succeed his longing with startling swiftness. The "So" of ver. 4 seems to be equivalent to "Accordingly"—*i.e.*, since Thy loving-kindness is such supreme good, and is mine because I have desired it. Continual praise and as continual invocation are the fitting employments of those who receive it, and by these alone can their possession of the loving-kindness bestowed be made permanent. If empty palms are not ever lifted towards God, His gifts will not descend. When these are received, they will fall like morning sunbeams on stony and dumb lips, which before were only parted to let out sighs, and will draw forth music of praise. There are longings which never are satisfied; but God lets no soul that thirsts for Him perish for lack of the water of life. Wisdom bids us fix our desires on that Sovereign Good, to long for which is ennobling and blessed, and to possess which is rest and the beginning of heaven.

Thus the psalmist passes imperceptibly to the second strophe, in which the longing soul becomes the satisfied soul. The emblem of a feast is naturally suggested by the previous metaphor of thirst. The same conviction, which urged the psalmist forward in his search after God, now assures him of absolute satisfaction in finding Him. Since God's loving-kindness is better than life, the soul that possesses Him can have no unappeased cravings, nor any yet hungry affections

or wishes. In the region of communion with God, fruition is contemporaneous with and proportioned to desire. When the rain comes in the desert, what was baked earth is soon rich pasture, and the dry torrent beds, where the white stones glittered ghastly in the sunshine, are musical with rushing streams and fringed with budding oleanders. On that telegraph a message is flashed upwards and an answer speeds downwards, in a moment of time. Many of God's gifts are delayed by Love; but the soul that truly desires Him has never long to wait for a gift that equals its desire.

When God is possessed, the soul is satisfied. So entire is the correspondence between wants and gift, that every concavity in us finds, as it were, a convexity to match it in Him. The influx of the great ocean of God fills every curve of the shore to the brim, and the flashing glory of that sunlit sea covers the sands, and brings life where stagnation reigned and rotted. So the satisfied soul lives to praise, as the psalm goes on to vow. Lips that drink such draughts of Loving-kindness will not be slow to tell its sweetness. If we have nothing to say about God's goodness, the probable cause is our want of experience of it.

That feast leaves no bitter taste. The remembrance of it is all but as sweet as its enjoyment was. Thus, in ver. 6, the psalmist recounts how, in the silent hours of night, when many joys are seen to be hollow, and conscience wakes to condemn coarse delights, he recalled his blessednesses in God, and, like a ruminant animal, tasted their sweetness a second time. The verse is best regarded as an independent sentence. So blessed was the thought of God, that, if once it rose in his wakeful mind as he lay on his bed, he "meditated"

on it all the night. Hasty glances show little of anything great. Nature does not unveil her beauty to a cursory look; much less does God disclose His. If we would feel the majesty of the heavens, we must gaze long and steadfastly into their violet depths. The mention of the "night-watches" is appropriate, if this psalm is David's. He and his band of fugitives had to keep vigilant guard as they lay down shelterless in the desert; but even when thus ringed by possible perils, and listening for the shout of nocturnal assailants, the psalmist could recreate and calm his soul by meditation on God. Nor did his experience of God's sufficiency bring only remembrances; it kindled hopes. "For Thou hast been a help for me; and in the shadow of Thy wings will I shout for joy." Past deliverances minister to present trust and assure of future joy. The prerogative of the soul, blessed in the sense of possessing God, is to discern in all that has been the manifestations of His help, and to anticipate in all that is to come the continuance of the same. Thus the second strophe gathers up the experiences of the satisfied soul as being fruition, praise, sweet lingering memories that fill the night of darkness and fear, and settled trust in the coming of a future which will be of a piece with such a present and past.

The third strophe (vv. 8–11) presents a stage in the devout soul's experience which naturally follows the two preceding. Ver. 8 has a beautifully pregnant expression for the attitude of the satisfied soul. Literally rendered, the words run, "cleaves after Thee," thus uniting the ideas of close contact and eager pursuit. Such union, however impossible in the region of lower aims, is the very characteristic of communion with God, in which fruition subsists along with longing, since

God is infinite, and the closest approach to and fullest possession of Him are capable of increase. Satisfaction tends to became satiety when that which produces it is a creature whose limits are soon reached; but the cup which God gives to a thirsty soul has no cloying in its sweetness. On the other hand, to seek after Him has no pain nor unrest along with it, since the desire for fuller possession comes from the felt joy of present attainment. Thus, in constant interchange satisfaction and desire beget each other, and each carries with it some trace of the other's blessedness.

Another beautiful reciprocity is suggested by the very order of the words in the two clauses of ver. 8. The first ends with "Thee"; the second begins with "Me." The mutual relation of God and the soul is here set forth. He who "cleaves after God" is upheld in his pursuit by God's hand. And not in his pursuit only, but in all his life; for the condition of receiving sustaining help is desire for it, directed to God and verified by conduct. Whoever thus follows hard after God will feel his outstretched, seeking hand inclosed in a strong and loving palm, which will steady him against assaults and protect him in dangers. "No man is able to pluck them out of the Father's hand," if only they do not let it go. It may slip from slack fingers.

We descend from the heights of mystic communion in the remainder of the psalm. But in the singer's mind his enemies were God's enemies, and, as ver. 11 shows, were regarded as apostates from God in being traitors to "the king." They did not "swear by Him"—*i.e.*, they did not acknowledge God as God. Therefore, such being their character, the psalmist's confidence that God's right hand upheld him necessarily

passes into assurance of their defeat. This is not vindictiveness, but confidence in the sufficiency of God's protection, and is perfectly accordant with the lofty strains of the former part of the psalm. The picture of the fate of the beaten foe is partly drawn from that of Korah and his company. These rebels against God's king shall go, where those rebels against His priest long ago descended. "They shall be poured out upon the hands of the sword," or, more literally still, "They shall pour him out," is a vigorous metaphor, incapable of transference into English, describing how each single enemy is given over helplessly, as water is poured out, to the sword, which is energetically and to our taste violently, conceived of as a person with hands. The meaning is plain—a battle is impending, and the psalmist is sure that his enemies will be slain, and their corpses torn by beasts of prey.

How can the "king's" rejoicing in God be the consequence of their slaughter, unless they are rebels? And what connection would the defeat of a rebellion have with the rest of the psalm, unless the singer were himself the king? "This one line devoted to the king is strange," says Cheyne. The strangeness is unaccounted for, but on the supposition that David is the king and singer. If so, it is most natural that his song should end with a note of triumph, and should anticipate the joy of his own heart and the "glorying" of his faithful followers, who had been true to God in being loyal to His anointed.

PSALM LXIV.

1 Hear, O God, my voice in my complaint,
From the fear of the enemy guard my life.
2 Hide me from the secret assembly of evil-doers,
From the noisy crowd of workers of iniquity:

3 Who whet, like a sword, their tongue,
[Who] aim [as] their arrow a bitter word,
4 To shoot in hiding-places [at] the upright:
Suddenly they shoot [at] him, and fear not.

5 They strengthen themselves [in] an evil plan,
They talk of laying snares,
They say, Who looks at them?
6 They scheme villainies,
We have perfected [say they] a scheme [well] schemed:
And the inward part of each, and [his] heart, is deep.

7 But God shoots [at] them [with] an arrow,
Suddenly come their wounds.
8 And they are made to stumble,
Their own tongue [comes] upon them,
All who look on them shake the head.

9 And all men fear,
And declare the act of God,
And understand His work.
10 The righteous shall rejoice in Jehovah, and take refuge in Him,
And all the upright in heart shall glory.

FAMILIAR notes are struck in this psalm, which has no very distinctive features. Complaint of secret slanderers, the comparison of their words to arrows and swords, their concealed snares, their blasphemous defiance of detection, the sudden flashing out

of God's retribution, the lesson thereby read to and learned by men, the vindication of God's justice, and praise from all true hearts, are frequent themes. They are woven here into a whole which much resembles many other psalms. But the singer's heart is none the less in his words because many others before him have had to make like complaints and to stay themselves on like confidence. "We have all of us one human heart," and well-worn words come fresh to each lip when the grip of sorrow is felt.

The division into pairs of verses is clear here. The burdened psalmist begins with a cry for help, passes on to dilate on the plots of his foes, turns swiftly from these to confidence in God, which brings future deliverance into present peril and sings of it as already accomplished, and ends with the assurance that his enemies' punishment will witness for God and gladden the upright.

In the first pair of verses complaint is sublimed into prayer, and so becomes strengthening instead of weakening. He who can cry "Hear, O God, guard, hide" has already been able to hide in a safe refuge. "The terror caused by the enemy" is already dissipated when the trembling heart grasps at God; and escape from facts which warrant terror will come in good time. This man knows himself to be in danger of his life. There are secret gatherings of his enemies, and he can almost hear their loud voices as they plan his ruin. What can he do, in such circumstances, but fling himself on God? No thought of resistance has he. He can *but* pray, but he *can* pray; and no man is helpess who can look up. However high and closely engirdling may be the walls that men or sorrows build around us, there is always an opening in the dungeon

roof, through which heaven is visible and prayers can mount.

The next two pairs of verse (3–6) describe the machinations of the enemies in language for the most part familiar, but presenting some difficulties. The metaphors of a slanderous tongue as a sword and mischief-meaning words as arrows have occurred in several other psalms (*e.g.*, lv. 21 ; lvii. 4 ; lix. 7). The reference may either be to calumnies or to murderous threats and plans. The latter is the more probable. Secret plots are laid, which are suddenly unmasked. From out of some covert of seeming friendship an unlooked-for arrow whizzes. The archers "shoot, and fear not." They are sure of remaining concealed, and fear neither man's detection of them nor God's.

The same ideas are enlarged on in the third verse-pair (5, 6) under a new metaphor. Instead of arrows flying in secret, we have now snares laid to catch unsuspecting prey. "They strengthen themselves [in] an evil plan" (lit. *word*) pictures mutual encouragement and fixed determination. They discuss the best way of entrapping the psalmist, and, as in the preceding verse, flatter themselves that their subtle schemes are too well buried to be observed, whether by their victim or by God. Ver. 6 tells without a figure the fact meant in both figures. "They scheme villainies," and plume themselves upon the cleverness of their unsuspected plots. The second clause of the verse is obscure. But the suppositions that in it the plotters speak as in the last clause of the preceding verse, and that "they say" or the like expression is omitted for the sake of dramatic effect, remove much of the difficulty. "We have schemed a well-schemed plan" is their complacent estimate.

God's retribution scatters their dreams of impunity, as the next pair of verses (7, 8) tells. The verbs are in the past tense, though the events described are still in the future; for the psalmist's faith reckons them to be as good as done. They were shooting at him. God will shoot at them. The archer becomes a target. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Punishment is moulded after the guise of sin. The allusion to ver. 4 is made more obvious by adopting a different division of ver. 7 from that directed by the accents, and beginning the second half with "Suddenly," as in ver. 4. Ver. 8 *b* is with difficulty made intelligible with the existing reading. Probably the best that can be done with it is to render it as above, though it must be acknowledged that "their tongue comes upon them" needs a good deal of explanation to be made to mean that the consequences of their sins of speech fall on them. The drift of the clause must be that retribution falls on the offending tongue; but there is probably some textual corruption now unremovable. Cheyne wisely falls back on asterisks. Whatever is the precise nature of the instance of *lex talionis* in the clause, it is hailed with gestures of scornful approval by all beholders. Many men approve the Divine punishments, who have no deep horror of the sins that are punished. There is something of a noble, if rough, sense of justice in most men, and something of an ignoble satisfaction in seeing the downfall of the powerful, and both sentiments set heads nodding approval of God's judgments.

The psalm closes with the familiar thought that these judgments will move to wholesome awe and be told from lip to lip, while they become to the righteous occasion of joy, incitements to find refuge in God, and

material for triumph. These are large consequences to flow from one man's deliverance. The anticipation would be easily explained if we took the speaker to be the personified nation. But it would be equally intelligible if he were in any way a conspicuous or representative person. The humblest may feel that his experience of Divine deliverance witnesses, to as many as know it, of a delivering God. That is a high type of godliness which, like this psalmist, counts the future as so certain that it can be spoken of as present even in peril. It augurs a still higher to welcome deliverance, not only for the ease it brings to the suppliant, but for the glory it brings to God.

PSALM LXV.

1 To Thee silence is praise, O God, in Zion,
And to Thee shall the vow be paid.
2 O Thou hearer of prayer,
To Thee all flesh comes.
3 Deeds of iniquity have been too strong for me:
Our transgressions—Thou, Thou coverest them.
4 Blessed is he whom Thou choosest and bringest near,
That he may dwell in Thy courts:
We would be filled with the goodness of Thy house,
Thy holy temple.

5 By dread deeds in righteousness Thou dost answer us, O God of our salvation,
The confidence of all the ends of the earth and of the remotest sea:
6 Setting fast the mountains by His strength,
Being girded with might,
7 Stilling the roar of the seas, the roar of their billows,
And the tumult of the peoples.
8 So that the inhabitants of the ends [of the earth] become afraid at Thy signs:
The regions whence morning and evening come forth
Thou makest to shout for joy.

9 Thou hast visited the land and watered it,
Thou enrichest it abundantly [by] a river of God, full of water,
Thou preparest their corn when thus Thou preparest it:
10 Watering its furrows, levelling its ridges,
With showers Thou softenest it,
Its outgrowth Thou dost bless.
11 Thou hast crowned the year of Thy goodness,
And Thy chariot-tracks drop fatness.

12 The pastures of the wilderness drop,
And the heights gird themselves with leaping gladness.
13 The meadows are clothed with flocks,
And the valleys are covered with corn,
They shout for joy, they also sing.

THIS and the two following psalms form a little group, with one great thought dominant in each —namely, that God's manifestations of grace and providence to Israel are witnesses to the world. They all reach out to "the ends of the earth" in yearning and confidence that God's name will be adored there, and they all regard His dealings with His people as His appeals to mankind, which will not always be vain. Psalm lxv. begins with that privilege of approach to God with which Psalm lxvi. ends. In both, iniquity in heart is regarded as hindering access to God; and, in both, the psalmist's experience of answered prayer is treated as testimony for the world of the blessedness of worshipping Israel's God. This psalm falls into three parts, which set forth a threefold revelation of God in His acts. The first (vv. 1–4) deals with the most intimate privileges of the men who dwell in His house. The second (vv. 5–8) points to His rule in nature, the tokens of God's power in the mighty things of creation —mountains, ocean, day and night, the radiant east, the solemn sunset-west. The third (vv. 9–13) gives a lovely picture of the annual miracle which brings harvest joys. The underlying thought binding these three parts into unity seems to be the witness to God's name which each set of His acts bears—a witness which "they that dwell in the uttermost parts" hear sounded in their ears. If this is the true view of the psalm, we may hear a reminiscence of it in Paul's remonstrance with the rude Lycaonian peasants: "He

left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness."

The first strophe is wholly concerned with the glory of God as answering prayer. It begins with enigmatical words, which, if the existing text is adhered to, carry a deep truth. There are two kinds of prayer—wordless submission of will and spoken vows. The former is truly praise. The same thought is found in Psalm lxii. It goes down to the root of the matter. The true notion of prayer is not that of swaying God's will to gratify ours, but that of bringing ours into unremonstrating acceptance of His. When the accents of eager desire or of impatient murmuring and vain sobs and weeping are hushed, the still soul enters into closeness of communion, else unattainable. Beautiful and profoundly true as this is, it is not indubitably the psalmist's meaning; and there is much to be said for the rendering which is adopted from the LXX. by many commentators, and which only requires a slight change in the vocalisation—namely, "Praise is meet for Thee." But that idea is expressed in Psalm xxxiii. 1 by a different word, and the meaning of the one used here is not *to be suitable for*, but *to be like*. So that we have to choose between altering the text and then imposing a somewhat unusual meaning on the word gained, and adhering to the present reading and gaining a meaning which is admitted to be "fine" but alleged to be "unbiblical." On the whole, that meaning seems preferable. The convictions that God accepts silent devotion and answers vows, so that the thank-offering promised in trouble will be called for by deliverance, "fill the psalmist with a longing that all mankind may have recourse to the same Divine Friend" (Cheyne,

in loc.). His experience of accepted prayers has taught him that it is God's nature and property to be "the hearer of prayer" (the word is a participle, expressive of a permanent characteristic), and therefore he is sure that "all flesh," in its weariness and need of an ear into which to pour necessities and sorrows, will come to Him. His eye travels far beyond Israel, and contemplates mankind as coming to worship. But one black barrier rises between men and God, the separating power of which the singer has painfully felt. Sin chokes the stream that would flow from seeking hearts into the ocean of God. The very act of gathering himself up to pray and praise quickens the sense of sinfulness in the psalmist. Therefore his look turns swiftly inwards, for the only time in the psalm. The consciousness of transgression wakes the sense of personality and isolation as nothing else will, and for one bitter moment the singer is, as it were, prisoned in the awful solitude of individual responsibility. His words reflect his vivid sight of his sins in their manifoldness, for he says that "matters of iniquities" have overcome him. The exuberant expression is not tautological, but emotional. And then he passes into sunshine again, and finds that, though he had to be alone in guilt, he is one of a company in the experience of forgiveness. Emphatically he reduplicates "Thou" in his burst of confidence in God's covering of sins; for none but God can cope with the evil things that are too strong for man. I can neither keep them out, nor drive them out when they have come in, nor cleanse the stains that their hoofs have made; but Thou, Thou canst and dost cover them. Is not that an additional reason for "all flesh" coming to God, and almost a guarantee that they will?

The strophe ends with an exclamation celebrating the blessedness of dwelling with God. That refers, no doubt, to Israel's prerogative of access to the Temple; but the inward and outward are blended, as in many places in the Psalter where dwelling in the house of the Lord is yearned for or rejoiced in. The universalism of the psalm does not forget the special place held by the nation whom God "has chosen and brought near." But the reality beneath the symbol is too familiar and sweet to this singer for him to suppose that mere outward access exhausts the possibilities of blessed communion. It is no violent forcing more into his words than they contain, if we read in them deeply spiritual truths. It is noteworthy that they follow the reference to forgiveness, and, when taken in conjunction therewith, may be called an itinerary of the road to God. First comes forgiveness by expiation, for such is the meaning of "covering," Then the cleansed soul has "access with confidence"; then approaching, it happily dwells a guest in the house, and is supplied with that which satisfies all desires. The guest's security in the house of his host, his right to protection, help, and food, are, as usual, implied in the imagery. The prerogative of his nation, which the psalmist had in mind, is itself imagery, and the reality which it shadowed is that close abiding in God which is possible by faith, love, communion of spirit, and obedience of life, and which, wherever realised, keeps a soul in a great calm, whatever tempests rave, and satisfies its truest needs and deepest longings, whatever famine may afflict the outward life. Forgiven men may dwell with God. They who do are blessed.

The second strophe (vv. 5–8) celebrates another aspect of God's manifestation by deeds, which has, in

like manner, a message for the ends of the earth. Israel is again the immediate recipient of God's acts, but they reverberate through the world. Therefore in ver. 5 the two clauses are not merely adjacent, but connected. It is because God is ever revealing Himself to the nation (for the tense of the verb "answer" expresses continuous action) that He is revealed as the trust of the whole earth. God's grace fructifies through Israel to all. How clearly the psalmist had grasped the truth that God has limited the knowledge of Himself to one spot of earth in order to its universal diffusion!

The light is focussed and set in a tower that it may shine out over sea and storm. The fire is gathered into a brasier that it may warm all the house. Some commentators take that strong expression "the trust of all the ends of the earth" as asserting that even the confidences of idolaters in their gods are at bottom trust in Jehovah and find their way to Him. But such a view of idolatry is foreign to the Old Testament, and is not needed to explain the psalmist's words. God is the only worthy object of trust, and remains so whether men do in fact trust Him or not. And one day, thinks the psalmist, God's patient manifestation of His grace to Israel will tell, and all men will come to know Him for what He is. "The remotest sea" is not translation, but paraphrase. The psalmist speaks in vague terms, as one who knew not what lay beyond the horizon of that little-traversed western ocean. Literally his words are "the sea of the remote [peoples]"; but a possible emendation has been suggested, reading instead of *sea* "regions" or "nations." The change is slight, and smooths an awkward expression, but destroys the antithesis of earth and sea, and makes the second clause a somewhat weak repetition of the first.

From the self-revelation of God in history the psalm passes to His mighty deeds in nature (vv. 6, 7 *a*), and from these it returns to His providential guidance of human affairs (ver. 7 *b*). The two specimens of Divine power celebrated in vv. 6, 7, are suggested by the closing words of ver. 5. "The ends of the earth" were, according to ancient cosmography, girdled by mountains; and God has set these fast. The dash of "the remotest seas" is hushed by Him. Two mighty things are selected to witness to the Mightier who made and manages them. The firm bulk of the mountains is firm because He is strong. The tossing waves are still because He bids them be silent. How transcendently great then is He, and how blind those who, seeing hill and ocean, do not see God! The mention of the sea, the standing emblem of unrest and rebellious power, suggests the "tumult of the peoples," on which similar repressive power is exercised. The great deeds of God, putting down tyranny and opposition to Israel, which is rebellion against Himself, strike terror, which is wholesome and is purified into reverence, into the distant lands; and so, from the place where the sun rises to the "sad-coloured end of evening" where it sinks in the west, *i.e.*, through all the earth, there rings out a shout of joy. Such glowing anticipations of universal results from the deeds of God, especially for Israel, are the products of diseased national vanity, unless they are God-taught apprehension of the Divine purpose of Israel's history, which shall one day be fulfilled, when the knowledge of the yet more wondrous deeds which culminated in the Cross is spread to the ends of the earth and the remotest seas.

God reveals Himself not only in the sanctities of His house, nor in His dread "signs" in nature and history,

but in the yearly recurring harvest, which was waving, as yet unreaped, while the poet sang. The local colouring which regards rain as the chief factor in fertility and the special gift of God is noticeable. In such a land as Palestine, irrigation seems the one thing needful to turn desert into fruitful field. To "water" the soil is there emphatically to "enrich" it. The psalmist uses for "river" the technical word for an irrigation cutting, as if he would represent God in the guise of the cultivator, who digs his ditches that the sparkling blessing may reach all his field. But what a difference between men-made watercourses and God's! The former are sometimes flooded, but often dry; His are full of water. The prose of the figure is, of course, abundant rain. It prepares the earth for the seed, and "so" in effect prepares the corn. The one is the immediate, the other the ultimate issue and purpose. Spring showers prepare autumn fruits. It is so in all regions of man's endeavour and of God's work; and it is practical wisdom to train ourselves to see the assurance of the end in His means, and to be confident that whatever His doings have a manifest tendency to effect shall one day be ripened and harvested. How lovingly and patiently the psalm represents the Divine Husbandman as attending to all the steps of the process needed for the great ingathering! He guides the showers, he fills the little valleys of the furrows, and smooths down the tiny hills of the intervening ridges. He takes charge of the germinating seed, and His sunshine smiles a benediction on the tender green blade, as it pricks through the earth which has been made soft enough for it to pierce from beneath. This unhesitating recognition of the direct action of God in all "natural" processes is the true point of view

from which to regard them. God is the only force; and His immediate action is present in all material changes. The Bible knows nothing of self-moving powers in nature, and the deepest conception of God's relations to things sensible knows as little. "There is no power but of God" is the last word of religion and of true philosophy.

The poet stands in the joyous time when all the beauty of summer flushes the earth, and the harvest is yet a hope, not a, possibly disappointing reality. It is near enough to fill his song with exultation. It is far enough off to let him look on the whitened fields, and not on the bristly stubble. So he regards the "crown" as already set on a year of goodness. He sees God's chariot passing in triumph and blessing over the land, and leaving abundance wherever its wheel-tracks go. Out in the uncultivated prairie, where sweet grass unsown by man grows, is the flush of greenery, where, before the rain, was baked and gaping earth. The hills, that wear a girdle of forest trees half-way up towards their barren summits, wave their foliage, as if glad. The white fleeces of flocks are dotted over the vivid verdure of every meadow, and one cannot see the ground for the tall corn that stands waiting for the sickle, in each fertile plain. The psalmist hears a hymn of glad praise rising from all these happy and sunny things; and for its melody he hushes his own, that he and we may listen to

> "The fair music that all creatures make
> To their great Lord."

PSALM LXVI.

1 Shout joyfully to God, all the earth,
2 Harp [unto] the glory of His name,
Render glory [to Him by] His praise.
3 Say to God, How dread are Thy works!
For the greatness of Thy strength shall Thy enemies feign
[submission] to Thee.
4 All the earth shall bow down to Thee, and harp to Thee,
They shall harp [to] Thy name. Selah.

5 Come, and behold the deeds of God;
He is dread in His doing towards the sons of men.
6 He turned the sea to dry land,
They went through the river on foot,
There let us rejoice in Him.
7 He rules by His might for ever;
His eyes watch the nations,
The rebellious—let them not exalt themselves. Selah.

8 Bless our God, ye peoples,
And let the voice of His praise be heard!
9 Who has set our soul in life,
And has not let our foot slip.
10 For Thou hast proved us, O God,
Thou hast refined us, as silver is refined.
11 Thou hast brought us into the fortress-dungeon,
Thou hast laid a heavy burden on our loins.
12 Thou hast caused men to ride over our head,
We have come into the fire and into the water,
But Thou broughtest us out into abundance.

13 I will go into Thy house with burnt offerings,
I will render to Thee my vows,
14 Which my lips uttered,
And my mouth spoke, in my straits.

15 Burnt offerings of fatlings will I offer to Thee,
With the savour of rams,
I will offer bullocks with goats. Selah.

16 Come, hearken, and I will recount, all ye that fear God,
What He has done for my soul.
17 To Him did I cry with my mouth,
And a song extolling [Him] was [already] under my tongue.
18 If I had intended iniquity in my heart,
The Lord would not hear:
19 But surely God has heard,
He has attended to the voice of my prayer.
20 Blessed be God,
Who has not turned away my prayer, nor His loving-kindness from me.

THE most striking feature of this psalm is the transition from the plural "we" and "our," in vv. 1–12, to the singular "I" and "my," in vv. 13–20. Ewald supposes that two independent psalms have been united, but ver. 12 is as abrupt for an ending as ver. 13 is for a beginning; and the "Come, hear," of ver. 16 echoes the "Come, and see," of ver. 5. It is possible that "the 'I' of the second part is identical with the 'we' of the first; in other words, that the personified community speaks here" (Baethgen); but the supposition that the psalm was meant for public worship, and is composed of a choral and a solo part, accounts for the change of number. Such expressions as "my soul" and "my heart" favour the individual reference. Of course, the deliverance magnified by the single voice is the same as that celebrated by the loud acclaim of many tongues; but there is a different note in the praise of the former—there is a tone of inwardness in it, befitting individual appropriation of general blessings. To this highest point, that of the action of the single soul in taking the deliverances of the community for

its very own, and pouring out its own praise, the psalm steadily climbs. It begins with the widest outlook over "all the earth," summoned to ring forth joyous praise. It ends focussed to one burning point, in a heart fired by the thought that God "has not turned away his loving-kindness from *me*." So we learn how each single soul has to claim its several part in world-wide blessings, as each flower-calyx absorbs the sunshine that floods the pastures.

The psalm has no superscription of date or author, and no clue in its language to the particular deliverance that called it forth. The usual variety of conjectures have been hazarded. The defeat of Sennacherib occurs to some; the return from Babylon to others; the Maccabean period to yet another school of critics. It belongs to a period when Israel's world-significance and mission were recognised (which Cheyne considers a post-exilic feature, "Orig. of Psalt.," 176), and when the sacrificial worship was in full force; but beyond these there are no clear data for period of composition.

It is divided into five strophes, three of which are marked by Selah. That musical indication is wanting at the close of the third strophe (ver. 12), which is also the close of the first or choral part, and its absence may be connected with the transition to a single voice. A certain progress in thought is noticeable, as will appear as we proceed. The first strophe calls upon all the earth to praise God for His works. The special deeds which fire the psalmist are not yet mentioned, though they are present to his mind. The summons of the world to praise passes over into prophecy that it shall praise. The manifestation of God's character by act will win homage. The great thought that God has but to be truly known in order to be reverenced

is an axiom with this psalmist; and no less certain is he that such knowledge and such praise will one day fill the world. True, he discerns that submission will not always be genuine; for he uses the same word to express it as occurs in Psalm xviii. 44, which represents "feigned homage." Every great religious awakening has a fringe of adherents, imperfectly affected by it, whose professions outrun reality, though they themselves are but half conscious that they feign. But though this sobering estimate of the shallowness of a widely diffused recognition of God tones down the psalmist's expectations, and has been abundantly confirmed by later experience, his great hope remains as an early utterance of the conviction, which has gathered assurance and definiteness by subsequent Revelation, and is now familiar to all. The world is God's. His Self-revelation will win hearts. There shall be true submission and joyous praise, girdling the earth as it rolls. The psalmist dwells mainly on the majestic and awe-inspiring aspect of God's acts. His greatness of power bears down opposition. But the later strophes introduce other elements of the Divine nature and syllables of the Name, though the inmost secret of the "power of God" in the weakness of manhood and the all-conquering might of Love is not yet ripe for utterance.

The second strophe advances to a closer contemplation of the deeds of God, which the nations are summoned to behold. He is not only "dread" in His doings towards mankind at large, but Israel's history is radiant with the manifestation of His name, and that past lives on, so that ancient experiences give the measure and manner of to-day's working. The retrospect embraces the two standing instances of God's delivering help—the passage of the Red Sea and of

Jordan—and these are not dead deeds in a far-off century. For the singer calls on his own generation to rejoice "there" in Him. Ver. 6 *c* is by some translated as "There did we rejoice," and more accurately by others, "Let us rejoice." In the former case the essential solidarity of all generations of the nation is most vividly set forth. But the same idea is involved in the correct rendering, according to which the men of the psalmist's period are entitled and invoked to associate themselves in thought with that long-past generation, and to share in their joy, since they do possess the same power which wrought then. God's work is never antiquated. It is all a revelation of eternal activities. What He has been, He is. What He did, He does. Therefore faith may feed on all the records of old time, and expect the repetition of all that they contain. Such an application of history to the present makes the nerve of this strophe. For ver. 7, following on the retrospect, declares the perpetuity of God's rule, and that His eyes still keep an outlook, as a watchman on a tower might do, to mark the enemies' designs, in order that He may intervene, as of old, for His people's deliverance. He "looked forth upon the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of cloud" (Exod. xiv. 24). Thus He still marks the actions and plans of Israel's foes. Therefore it were wise for the "rebellious" not to rear their heads so high in opposition.

The third strophe comes still closer to the particular deliverance underlying the psalm. Why should all "peoples" be called upon to praise God for it? The psalmist has learned that Israel's history is meant to teach the world what God is, and how blessed it is to dwell under His wing. No exclusiveness taints

his enjoyment of special national privileges. He has reached a height far above the conceptions of the rest of the world in his day, and even in this day, except where the Christian conception of "humanity" has been heartily accepted. Whence came this width of view, this purifying from particularism, this anticipation by so many centuries of a thought imperfectly realised even now? Surely a man who in those days and with that environment could soar so high must have been lifted by something mightier than his own spirit. The details of the Divine dealings described in the strophe are of small consequence in comparison with its fixed expectation of the world's participation in Israel's blessings. The familiar figures for affliction reappear—namely, proving and refining in a furnace. A less common metaphor is that of being prisoned in a *dungeon*, as the word rendered "net" in the A.V. and R.V. probably means. Another peculiar image is that o ver. 12: "Thou hast caused men to ride over our head." The word for "men" here connotes feebleness and frailty, characteristics which make tyranny more intolerable; and the somewhat harsh metaphor is best explained as setting forth insolent and crushing domination, whether the picture intended is that of ruthless conquerors driving their chariots over their prone victims, or that of their sitting as an incubus on their shoulders and making them like beasts of burden. Fire and water are standing figures for affliction. With great force these accumulated symbols of oppression are confronted by one abrupt clause ending the strophe, and describing in a breath the perfect deliverance which sweeps them all away: "Thou broughtest us out into abundance." There is no need for the textual alteration of the last word into "a wide place" (Hupfeld),

a place of liberty (Cheyne), or freedom (Baethgen). The word in the received text is that employed in Psalm xxiii. 5. "My cup is *overfulness*" and "abundance" yields a satisfactory meaning here, though not closely corresponding to any of the preceding metaphors for affliction.

The fourth strophe (vv. 13–15) begins the solo part. It clothes in a garb appropriate to a sacrificial system the thought expressed in more spiritual dress in the next strophe, that God's deliverance should evoke men's praise. The abundance and variety of sacrifices named, and the fact that "rams" were not used for the offerings of individuals, seem to suggest that the speaker is, in some sense, representing the nation, and it has been supposed that he may be the high priest. But this is merely conjecture, and the explanation may be that there is a certain ideal and poetical tone over the representation, which does not confine itself to scrupulous accuracy.

The last strophe (vv. 16–20) passes beyond sacrificial symbols, and gives the purest utterance to the emotions and resolves which ought to well up in a devout soul on occasion of God's goodness. Not only does the psalmist teach us how each individual must take the general blessing for his very own—of which act the faith which takes the world's Christ for my Christ is the supreme example—but he teaches us that the obligation laid on all recipients of God's mercy is to tell it forth, and that the impulse is as certain to follow real reception as the command is imperative. Just as Israel received deliverances that the whole earth might learn how strong and gracious was Israel's God, we receive His blessings, and chiefly His highest gift of life in Christ, not only that we may live, but that, living,

we may "declare the works of the Lord." He has little possession of God's grace who has not felt the necessity of speech, and the impossibility of the lips being locked when the heart is full.

The psalmist tells his experience of God's answers to his prayer in a very striking fashion. Ver. 17 says that he cried to God; and while his uttered voice was supplication, the song extolling God for the deliverance asked was, as it were, lying under his tongue, ready to break forth,—so sure was he that his cry would be heard. That is a strong faith which prepares banners and music for the triumph before the battle is fought. It would be presumptuous folly, not faith, if it rested on anything less certain than God's power and will.

"I find David making a syllogism in mood and figure. . . . 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me: but verily God hath heard me; He hath attended to the voice of my prayer.' Now, I expected that David would have concluded thus: 'Therefore I regard not wickedness in my heart.' But far otherwise he concludes: 'Blessed be God, who hath not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me.' Thus David hath deceived but not wronged me. I looked that he should have clapped the crown on his own, and he puts it on God's head. I will learn this excellent logic." So says Fuller ("Good Thoughts in Bad Times," p. 34, Pickering's ed., 1841). No doubt, however, the psalmist means to suggest, though he does not state, that his prayer was sincere. There is no self-complacent attribution of merit to his supplication, in the profession that it was untainted by any secret, sidelong looking towards evil; and Fuller is right in emphasising the suppression of the statement. But even the appearance of such is avoided by the jet

of praise which closes the psalm. Its condensed brevity has induced some critics to mend it by expansion, as they regard it as incongruous to speak of turning away a man's prayer from himself. Some would therefore insert "from Him" after "my prayer," and others would expand still further by inserting an appropriate negative before "His loving-kindness." But the slight incongruity does not obscure the sense, and brings out strongly the flow of thought. So fully does the psalmist feel the connection between God's loving-kindness and his own prayer, that these are, as it were, smelted into one in his mind, and the latter is so far predominant in his thoughts that he is unconscious of the anomaly of his expression. To expand only weakens the swing of the words and the power of the thought. It is possible to tame lyric outbursts into accuracy at the cost of energy. Psalmists are not bound to be correct in style. Rivers wind; canals are straight.

PSALM LXVII.

1 God be gracious to us, and bless us,
And cause His face to shine among us; Selah.
2 That Thy way may be known upon earth,
Thy salvation among all nations.

3 Let peoples give Thee thanks, O God,
Let peoples, all of them, give Thee thanks.
4 Let tribes rejoice and shout aloud,
For Thou wilt judge peoples in equity,
And tribes on the earth wilt Thou lead. Selah.
5 Let peoples give Thee thanks, O God,
Let peoples, all of them, give Thee thanks.

6 The earth has yielded her increase:
May God, [even] our God, bless us!
7 May God bless us,
And may all the ends of the earth fear Him!

THIS little psalm condenses the dominant thought of the two preceding into a series of aspirations after Israel's blessing, and the consequent diffusion of the knowledge of God's way among all lands. Like Psalm lxv., it sees in abundant harvests a type and witness of God's kindness. But, whereas in Psalm lxv. the fields were covered with corn, here the increase has been gathered in. The two psalms may or may not be connected in date of composition as closely as these two stages of one harvest-time.

The structure of the psalm has been variously conceived. Clearly the Selahs do not guide as to divisions in the flow of thought. But it may be noted that the

seven verses in the psalm have each two clauses, with the exception of the middle one (ver. 4), which has three. Its place and its abnormal length mark it as the core, round which, as it were, the whole is built up. Further, it is as if encased in two verses (vv. 3, 5), which, in their four clauses, are a fourfold repetition of a single aspiration. These three verses are the heart of the psalm—the desire that all the earth may praise God, whose providence blesses it all. They are again enclosed in two strophes of two verses each (vv. 1, 2, and 6, 7), which, like the closer wrapping round the core, are substantially parallel, and, unlike it, regard God's manifestation to Israel as His great witness to the world. Thus, working outwards from the central verse, we have symmetry of structure, and intelligible progress and distinctness of thought.

Another point of difficulty is the rendering of the series of verbs in the psalm. Commentators are unanimous in taking those of ver. 1 as expressions of desire; but they bewilderingly diverge in their treatment of the following ones. Details of the divergent interpretations, or discussions of their reasons, cannot be entered on here. It may be sufficient to say that the adherence throughout to the optative rendering, admitted by all in ver. 1, gives a consistent colouring to the whole. It is arbitrary to vary the renderings in so short a psalm. But, as is often the case, the aspirations are so sure of their correspondence with the Divine purpose that they tremble on the verge of being prophecies, as, indeed, all wishes that go out along the line of God's "way" are. Every deep, God-inspired longing whispers to its utterer assurance that so it shall be; and therefore such desires have ever in them an element of fruition, and know nothing of the pain

of earthly wishes. They who stretch out empty hands to God never "gather dust and chaff."

The priestly blessing (Numb. vi. 24–26) moulds ver. 1, but with the substitution of *God* for *Jehovah*, and of "among us" for "upon us." The latter variation gives an impression of closer contact of men with the lustre of that Divine Light, and of yet greater condescension in God. The soul's longing is not satisfied by even the fullest beams of a Light that is fixed on high; it dares to wish for the stooping of the Sun to dwell among us. The singer speaks in the name of the nation; and, by using the priestly formula, claims for the whole people the sacerdotal dignity which belonged to it by its original constitution. He gives that idea its widest extension. Israel is the world's high priest, lifting up intercessions and holy hands of benediction for mankind. What self-effacement, and what profound insight into and sympathy with the mind of God breathe in that collocation of desires, in which the gracious lustre of God's face shining on us is longed for, chiefly that thence it may be reflected into the dark places of earth, to gladden sad and seeking eyes! This psalmist did not know in how true a sense the Light would come to dwell among men of Israel's race, and thence to flood the world; but his yearning is a foreshadowing of the spirit of Christianity, which forbids self-regarding monopoly of its blessings. If a man is "light in the Lord," he cannot but shine. "God hath shined into our hearts, that we may give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God." A Church illuminated with a manifestly Divine light is the best witness for God. Eyes which cannot look on the Sun may gaze at the clouds, which tone down its colourless radiance into purple and gold.

The central core of the psalm may either be taken as summons to the nations or as expression of desire for them. The depth of the longing or the stringency of the summons is wonderfully given by that fourfold repetition of the same words in vv. 3 and 5, with the emphatic "all of them" in the second clause of each. Not less significant is the use of three names for the aggregations of men—nations (ver. 2), peoples, and tribes. All are included, whatever bond knits them in communities, whatever their societies call themselves, however many they are. The very vagueness gives sublimity and universality. We can fill the vast outline drawn by these sweeping strokes; and wider knowledge should not be attended with narrowed desires, nor feebler confidence that the Light shall lighten every land. It is noticeable that in this central portion the deeds of God among the nations are set forth as the ground of their praise and joy in Him. Israel had the light of His face, and that would draw men to Him. But all peoples have the strength of His arm to be their defender, and the guidance of His hand by providences and in other ways unrecognised by them. The "judgments" here contemplated are, of course, not retribution for evil, but the aggregate of dealings by which God shows His sovereignty in all the earth. The psalmist does not believe that God's goodness has been confined to Israel, nor that the rest of the world has been left orphaned. He agrees with Paul, "That which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God manifested it to them."

The final strophe (vv. 6, 7) is substantially a repetition of vv. 1, 2, with the addition that a past fact is laid as the foundation of the desires or hopes of future blessings. "The earth has yielded her increase."

This may show that the psalm is a harvest hymn, but it does not necessarily imply this. The thought may have been born at any time. The singer takes the plain fact that, year by year, by mysterious quickening which he recognises as of God, the fertile earth "causes the things sown in it to bring forth and bud," as an evidence of Divine care and kindliness, which warrants the desire and the confidence that all blessings will be given. It seems a large inference from such a premise; but it is legitimate for those who recognise God as working in nature, and have eyes to read the parables amid which we live. The psalmist reminds God of His own acts, and, further, of His own name, and builds on these his petitions and his faith. Because He is "our God" He will bless us; and since the earth has, by His gift, "yielded her increase," He will give the better food which souls need. This the singer desires, not only because he and his brethren need it, but because a happy people are the best witnesses for a good King, and worshippers "satisfied with favour and full of the blessing of the Lord" proclaim most persuasively, "Taste, and see that God is good." This psalm is a truly missionary psalm, in its clear anticipation of the universal spread of the knowledge of God, in its firm grasp of the thought that the Church has its blessings in order to the evangelisation of the world, and in its intensity of longing that from all the ends of the earth a shout of praise may go up to the God who has sent some rays of His light into them all, and committed to His people the task of carrying a brighter illumination to every land.

PSALM LXVIII.

1 Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered,
And let them who hate Him flee before Him.
2 As smoke is whirled, whirl [them] away:
As wax melts before fire,
May the wicked perish before God!
3 But may the righteous rejoice [and] exult before God,
And be mirthful in joy.
4 Sing to God, harp [to] His name:
Throw up a way for Him who rides through the deserts;
[In] Jah is His name; and exult ye before Him;
5 The orphans' father and the widows' advocate,
God in His holy dwelling-place,
6 God, who makes the solitary to dwell in a home,
Who brings out the prisoners into prosperity:
Yet the rebellious inhabit a burnt-up land.

7 O God, at Thy going forth before Thy people,
At Thy marching through the wilderness; Selah.
8 The earth quaked, the heavens also dropped before God:
Yonder Sinai [quaked] before God, the God of Israel.
9 With a gracious rain, O God, Thou didst besprinkle Thine inheritance;
And [when it was] faint, Thou didst refresh it.
10 Thine assembly dwelt herein:
Thou didst prepare in Thy goodness for the poor, O God.

11 The Lord gives the word:
The women telling the good tidings are a great army.
12 Kings of armies flee, they flee:
And the home-keeping [woman] divides the spoil.
13 Will ye lie among the sheep-pens?
[Ye shall be as] the wings of a dove that is covered with silver, (?)
And her pinions with yellow gold.
14 When the Almighty scattered kings in it,
It snowed in Salmon.

15 A mountain of God is the mountain of Bashan,
A many-peaked mountain is the mountain of Bashan.
16 Why look ye with envy, O many-peaked mountains,
On the mountain which God has desired to dwell in?
Yea, God will abide in it for ever.
17 The chariots of God are myriads and myriads, thousands on thousands:
God is among them;
Sinai is in the sanctuary.
18 Thou hast ascended on high,
Thou hast led captive a band of captives,
Thou hast taken gifts among men,
Yea, even the rebellious shall dwell with Jah, God.

19 Blessed be the Lord!
Day by day He bears our burdens,
Even the God [who is] our salvation.
20 God is to us a God of deliverances,
And Jehovah the Lord has escape from death.
21 Yea, God will crush the head of His enemies,
The hairy skull of him that goes on in his guiltiness.
22 The Lord has said, From Bashan I will bring back,
I will bring back from the depths of the sea:
23 That thou mayest bathe thy foot in blood,
That the tongue of thy dogs may have its portion from the enemy.

24 They have seen Thy goings, O God,
The goings of my God, my King, into the sanctuary.
25 Before go singers, after [come] those who strike the strings,
In the midst of maidens beating timbrels.
26 "In the congregations bless ye God,
The Lord, [ye who spring] from the fountain of Israel."
27 There was little Benjamin their ruler, (?)
The princes of Judah, their shouting multitude,
The princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali.

28 Command, O God, Thy strength,
Show Thyself strong, O God, Thou that hast wrought for us.
29 From Thy temple above Jerusalem
Unto Thee shall kings bring presents.
30 Rebuke the beast of the reeds,
The herd of bulls, with the calves of the peoples;
Tread down those that have pleasure in silver; (?)
Scatter the peoples that delight in wars.

31 Great ones shall come from Egypt,
Cush shall quickly stretch out her hands to God.

32 Ye kingdoms of the earth, sing to God;
Harp [unto] the Lord; Selah.
33 To Him who rides on the heavens of heavens, [which are] of old;
Lo, He utters His voice, a voice of strength.
34 Ascribe to God strength,
Whose majesty is over Israel, and His strength in the clouds.
35 Dread [art Thou], O God, from Thy sanctuaries,
The God of Israel,
He gives strength and fulness of might to His people.
Blessed be God!

THIS superb hymn is unsurpassed, if not unequalled, in grandeur, lyric fire, and sustained rush of triumphant praise. It celebrates a victory; but it is the victory of the God who enters as a conqueror into His sanctuary. To that entrance (vv. 15–18) all the preceding part of the psalm leads up; and from it all the subsequent part flows down. The Exodus is recalled as the progress of a king at the head of his hosts, and old pæans re-echo. That dwelling of God in the sanctuary is "for ever." Therefore in the second part of the psalm (vv. 19–35) its consequences for the psalmist's generation and for the future are developed —Israel's deliverance, the conquest of the nations, and finally the universal recognition of God's sovereignty and ringing songs sent up to Him.

The Davidic authorship is set aside as impossible by most recent commentators, and there is much in the psalm which goes against it; but, on the other hand, the Syro-Ammonite war (2 Sam. xi.), in which the ark was taken into the field, is not unnaturally supposed by Delitzsch and others to explain the special reference to the entrance of God into the sanctuary. The numerous quotations and allusions

are urged as evidence of late date, especially the undeniable resemblance with Isaiah II. But the difficulty of settling which of two similar passages is original and which copy is great; and if by one critical canon such allusions are marks of lateness, by another, rugged obscurities, such as those with which this psalm bristles, are evidences of an early date.

The mention of only four tribes in ver. 27 is claimed as showing that the psalm was written when Judæa and Galilee were the only orthodox districts, and central Palestine was in the hands of the Samaritans. But could there be any talk of "princes of Zebulun and Naphtali" then? The exultant tone of the psalm makes its ascription to such a date as the age of the Ptolemies unlikely, when "Israel is too feeble, too depressed, to dream of self-defence; and, if God does not soon interpose, will be torn to pieces" (Cheyne, "Aids to the Devout Study," etc., 335).

To the present writer it does not appear that the understanding and enjoyment of this grand psalm depend so much on success in dating it as is supposed. It may be post-exilic. Whoever fused its reminiscences of ancient triumph into such a glowing outburst of exultant faith, his vision of the throned God and his conviction that ancient facts reveal eternal truths remain for all generations as an encouragement of trust and a prophecy of God's universal dominion.

The main division at ver. 18 parts the psalm into two equal halves, which are again easily subdivided into strophes.

The first strophe (vv. 1–6) may be regarded as introductory to the chief theme of the first half—namely, the triumphant march of the conquering God to His sanctuary. It consists of invocation to Him to arise,

and of summons to His people to prepare His way and to meet Him with ringing gladness. The ground of both invocation and summons is laid in an expansion of the meaning of His name as Helper of the helpless, Deliverer of the captive, righteous, and plentifully rewarding the proud doer. The invocation echoes the Mosaic prayer "when the ark set forward" (Numb. x. 35), with the alteration of the tense of the verb from a simple imperative into a precative future, and of "Jehovah" into God. This is the first of the quotations characteristic of the psalm, which is penetrated throughout with the idea that the deeds of the past are revelations of permanent relations and activities. The ancient history glows with present life. Whatever God has done He is doing still. No age of the Church needs to look back wistfully to any former, and say, "Where be all His wondrous works which our fathers have told us of?" The twofold conditions of God's intervention are, as this strophe teaches, Israel's cry to Him to arise, and expectant diligence in preparing His way. The invocation, which is half of Israel's means of insuring His coming, being a quotation, the summons to perform the other half is naturally regarded by the defenders of the post-exilic authorship as borrowed from Isaiah II. (*e.g.*, xl. 3, lvii. 14, lxii. 10), while the supporters of an earlier date regard the psalm as the primary passage from which the prophet has drawn.

God "arises" when He displays by some signal act His care for His people. That strong anthropomorphism sets forth the plain truth that there come crises in history, when causes, long silently working, suddenly produce their world-shaking effects. God has seemed to sit passive; but the heavens open, and all but blind eyes can see Him, standing ready to smite that He may

deliver. When He rises to His feet, the enemy scatters in panic. His presence revealed is enough. The emphatic repetition of "before" in these verses is striking, especially when fully rendered,—from His face (ver. 1); from the face of the fire (ver. 2); from the face of God (ver. 2); before His face (vv. 3, 4). To His foes that face is dreadful, and they would fain cower away from its light; His friends sun themselves in its brightness. The same fire consumes and vivifies. All depends on the character of the recipients. In the psalm "the righteous" are Israel, the ideal nation; the "wicked" are its heathen foes; but the principle underlying the fervid words demands a real assimilation of moral character to the Divine, as a condition of being at ease in the Light.

The "deserts" are, in consonance with the immediately following reminiscences, those of the Exodus. Hupfeld and those who discover in the psalm the hopes of the captives in Babylon, take them to be the waste wilderness stretching between Babylon and Palestine. But it is better to see in them simply a type drawn from the past, of guidance through any needs or miseries. Vv. 5, 6, draw out at length the blessed significance of the name Jah, in order to hearten to earnest desire and expectance of Him. They are best taken as in apposition with "Him" in ver. 4. Well may we exult before Him who is the orphans' father, the widows' advocate. There may be significance in the contrast between what He is "in His holy habitation" and when He arises to ride through the deserts. Even in the times when he seems to be far above, dwelling in the separation of His unapproachable holiness, He is still caring and acting for the sad and helpless. But when He comes forth, it is to make the

solitary to dwell in a home, to bring out prisoners into prosperity. Are these simply expressions for God's general care of the afflicted, like the former clauses, or do they point back to the Exodus? A very slight change in the text gives the reading, "Makes the solitary to return home"; but even without that alteration, the last clause of the verse is so obviously an allusion to the disobedient, "whose carcasses fell in the wilderness," that the whole verse is best regarded as pointing back to that time. The "home" to which the people were led is the same as the "prosperity" into which the prisoners are brought—namely, the rest and well-being of Canaan; while the fate of the "rebellious" is, as it ever is, to live and die amidst the drought-stricken barrenness which they have chosen.

With the second strophe (vv. 7–10) begins the historical retrospect, which is continued till, at the end of the fourth (ver. 18), God is enthroned in the sanctuary, there to dwell for ever. In the second strophe the wilderness life is described. The third (vv. 11–14) tells of the victories which won the land. The fourth triumphantly contrasts the glory of the mountain where God at last has come to dwell, with the loftier peaks across the Jordan on which no such lustre gleams.

Vv. 7, 8, are from Deborah's song, with slight omissions and alterations, notably of "Jehovah" into "God." The phrase "before" still rings in the psalmist's ears, and he changes Deborah's words, in the first clause of ver. 7, so as to give the picture of God marching in front of His people, instead of, as the older song represented Him, coming from the east, to meet them marching from the west. The majestic theophany at the giving of the Law is taken as the culmination of His manifestations in the wilderness. Vv. 9, 10, are

capable of two applications. According to one, they anticipate the chronological order, and refer to the fertility of the land, and the abundance enjoyed by Israel when established there. According to the other, they refer to the sustenance of the people in the wilderness. The former view has in its favour the ordinary use of "inheritance" for the land, the likelihood that "rain" should be represented as falling on soil rather than on people, and the apparent reference in "dwelt therein," to the settlement in Canaan. The objection to it is that reference to peaceful dwelling in the land is out of place, since the next strophe pictures the conquest. If, then, the verses belong to the age of wandering, to what do they refer? Hupfeld tries to explain the "rain" as meaning the manna, and, still more improbably, takes the somewhat enigmatical "assembly" of ver. 10 to mean (as it certainly does) "living creatures," and to allude (as it surely does not) to the quails that fell round the camp. Most commentators now agree in transferring "thine inheritance" to the first clause, and in understanding it of the people, not of the land. The verse is intelligible either as referring to gifts of refreshment of spirit and courage bestowed on the people, in which case "rain" is symbolical; or to actual rainfall during the forty years of desert life, by which sowing and reaping were made possible. The division of the verse as in our translation is now generally adopted. The allusion to the provision of corn in the desert is continued in ver. 10, in which the chief difficulty is the ambiguous word "assembly." It may mean "living creatures," and is so taken here by the LXX. and others. It is twice used in 2 Sam. xxii. 11 (?), 13, for an army. Delitzsch atkes it as a comparison of Israel to a flock, thus

retaining the meaning of *creatures*. If the verse is interpreted as alluding to Israel's wilderness life, "therein" must be taken in a somewhat irregular construction, since there is no feminine noun at hand to which the feminine pronominal suffix in the word can be referred. In that barren desert, God's flock dwelt for more than a generation, and during all that time His goodness provided for them. The strophe thus gives two aspects of God's manifestation in the wilderness—the majestic and terrible, and the gentle and beneficent. In the psalmist's triumphant retrospect no allusion is made to the dark obverse—Israel's long ingratitude. The same history which supplies other psalmists and prophets with material for penetrating accusations yields to this one only occasion of praise. God's part is pure goodness; man's is shaded with much rebellious murmuring.

The next strophe (vv. 11–14) is abrupt and disconnected, as if echoing the hurry of battle and the tumult of many voices on the field. The general drift is unmistakable, but the meaning of part is the despair of commentators. The whole scene of the conflict, flight, and division of the spoil is flashed before us in brief clauses, panting with excitement and blazing with the glow of victory. "The Lord giveth the word." That "word" may be the news which the women immediately repeat. But it is far more vivid and truer to the spirit of the psalm, which sees God as the only actor in Israel's history, to regard it as the self-fulfilling decree which scatters the enemy. This battle is the Lord's. There is no description of conflict. But one mighty word is hurled from heaven, like a thunder-clap (the phrase resembles that employed so often, "the Lord gave His voice," which frequently means thunder-

peals), and the enemies' ranks are broken in panic. Israel does not need to fight. God speaks, and the next sound we hear is the clash of timbrels and the clear notes of the maidens chanting victory. This picture of a battle, with the battle left out, tells best Who fought, and how He fought it. "He spake, and it was done." What scornful picture of the flight is given by the reduplication "they flee, they flee"! It is like Deborah's fierce gloating over the dead Sisera: "He bowed, he fell, he lay: at her feet he bowed, he fell: where he bowed, there he fell." What confidence in the power of weakness, when God is on its side, in the antithesis between the mighty kings scattered in a general *sauve qui peut*, and the matrons who had "tarried at home" and now divide the spoil! Sisera's mother was pictured in Deborah's song as looking long through her lattice for her son's return, and solacing herself with the thought that he delayed to part the plunder and would come back laden with it. What she vainly hoped for Israel's matrons enjoy.

Vv. 13, 14, are among the hardest in the Psalter. The separate clauses offer no great difficulties, but the connection is enigmatical indeed. "Will (lit. *if*) ye lie among the sheepfolds?" comes from Deborah's song (Judg. v. 16), and is there a reproach flung at Reuben for preferring pastoral ease to warlike effort. Is it meant as reproach here? It is very unlikely that a song of triumph like this should have for its only mention of Israel's warriors a taunt. The lovely picture of the dove with iridescent wings is as a picture perfect. But what does it mean here? Herder, whom Hupfeld follows, supposes that the whole verse is rebuke to recreants, who preferred lying stretched at ease among their flocks, and bidding each

other admire the glancing plumage of the doves that flitted round them. But this is surely violent, and smacks of modern æstheticism. Others suppose that the first clause is a summons to be up and pursue the flying foe, and the second and third a description of the splendour with which the conquerors (or their households) should be clothed by the spoil. This meaning would require the insertion of some such phrase as "ye shall be" before the second clause. Delitzsch regards the whole as a connected description of the blessings of peace following on victory, and sees a reference to Israel as God's dove. "The new condition of prosperity is compared with the play of colours of a dove basking in the rays of the sun." All these interpretations assume that Israel is addressed in the first clause. But is this assumption warranted? Is it not more natural to refer the "ye" to the "kings" just mentioned, especially as the psalmist recurs to them in the next verse? The question will then retain the taunting force which it has in Deborah's song, while it pictures a very different kind of couching among the sheepfolds—namely, the hiding there from pursuit. The kings are first seen in full flight. Then the triumphant psalmist flings after them the taunt, "Will ye hide among the cattle?" If the initial particle retains its literal force, the first clause is hypothetical, and the suppression of the conclusion speaks more eloquently than its expression would have done: "If ye couch——" The second and third clauses are then parallel with the second of ver. 12, and carry on the description of the home-keeping matron, "the dove," adorned with rich spoils and glorious in her apparel. We thus have a complete parallelism between the two verses, which both lay side by side the contrasted pictures of the

defeated kings and the women; and we further establish continuity between the three verses (13–15), in so far as the "kings" are dealt with in them all.

Ver. 14 is even harder than the preceding. What does "in it" refer to? Is the second clause metaphor, requiring to be eked out with "It is like as when"? If figure, what does it mean? One is inclined to say with Baethgen, at the end of his comment on the words, "After all this, I can only confess that I do not understand the verse." Salmon was an inconsiderable hill in Central Palestine, deriving its name (Shady), as is probable, from forests on its sides. Many commentators look to that characteristic for explanation of the riddle. Snow on the dark hill would show very white. So after the defeat the bleached bones of the slain, or, as others, their glittering armour, would cover the land. Others take the point of comparison to be the change from trouble to joy which follows the foe's defeat, and is likened to the change of the dark hillside to a gleaming snow-field. Hupfeld still follows Herder in connecting the verse with the reproach which he finds in the former one, and seeing in the words "It snowed on Salmon" the ground of the recreants' disinclination to leave the sheepfolds—namely, that it was bad weather, and that, if snow lay on Salmon in the south, it would be worse in the north, where the campaign was going on! He acknowledges that this explanation requires "a good deal of acuteness to discover," and says that the only alternative to accepting it, provisionally, at all events, is to give up the hope of any solution. Cheyne follows Bickell in supposing that part of the text has dropped out, and proposes an additional clause at the beginning of the verse and an expansion of the last clause, arriving at this result: "[For full is our land of

spoil], When Shaddai scatters kings therein, [As the snow,] when it snows in Salmon." The adoption of these additions is not necessary to reach this meaning of the whole, which appears the most consonant with the preceding verses, as continuing the double reference which runs through them—namely, to the fugitive kings and the dividers of the spoil. On the one side we see the kings driven from their lurking-places among the sheepfolds; on the other, the gleam of rich booty, compared now to the shining white wrapping the dark hill, as formerly to the colours that shimmer on sunlit pinions of peaceful doves. If this is not the meaning, we can only fall back on the confession already quoted.

The battle is over, and now the Conqueror enters His palace-temple. The third strophe soars with its theme, describing His triumphal entry thither and permanent abiding there. The long years between the conquest of Canaan and the establishment of the ark on Zion dwindle to a span; for God's enthronement there was in one view the purpose of the conquest, which was incomplete till that was effected. There is no need to suppose any reference in the mention of Bashan to the victories over Og, its ancient king. The noble figure needs no historic allusion to explain it. These towering heights beyond Jordan had once in many places been seats of idol worship. They are emblems of the world's power. No light rests upon them, lofty though they are, like that which glorifies the insignificant top of Zion. They may well look enviously across the Jordan to the hill which God has desired for His abode. His triumphal procession is not composed of earthly warriors, for none such had appeared in the battle. He had conquered, not by employing human hands, but by His own "bright-harnessed angels." They now

surround Him in numbers innumerable, which language strains its power in endeavouring to reckon. "Myriads doubled, thousands of repetition," says the psalmist —indefinite expressions for a countless host. But all their wide-flowing ranks are clustered round the Conqueror, whose presence makes their multitude an unity, even as it gives their immortal frames their life and strength, and their faces all their lustrous beauty. "God is in the midst of them"; therefore they conquer and exult. "Sinai is in the sanctuary." This bold utterance has led to a suggested emendation, which has the advantage of bringing out clearly a quotation from Deut. xxxiii. 2. It combines the second and third clauses of ver. 17, and renders "The Lord hath come from Sinai into the sanctuary." But the existing text gives a noble thought—that now, by the entrance of God thither, Sinai itself is in the sanctuary, and all the ancient sanctities and splendours, which flamed round its splintered peaks, are housed to shine lambent from that humble hill. Sinai was nothing but for God's presence. Zion has that presence; and all that it ever meant it means still. The profound sense of the permanent nature of past revelation, which speaks all through the psalm, reaches its climax here.

The "height" to which ver. 18 triumphantly proclaims that God has gone up, can only be Zion. To take it as meaning the heavenly sanctuary, as in Psalm vii. 7 it unquestionably does, is forbidden by the preceding verses. Thither the conquering God has ascended, as to His palace, leading a long procession of bound captives, and there receiving tribute from the vanquished. Assyrian slabs and Egyptian paintings illustrate these representations. The last clause has been variously construed and understood. Is "Yea, even

the rebellious" to be connected with the preceding, and "among" to be supplied, so that those once rebellious are conceived of as tributary, or does the phrase begin an independent clause? The latter construction makes the remainder of the verse run more intelligibly, and obviates the need for supplying a preposition with "the rebellious." It still remains a question whether the last words of the clause refer to God's dwelling among the submissive rebels, or to their dwelling with God. If, however, it is kept in view that the context speaks of God as dwelling in His sanctuary, the latter is the more natural explanation, especially as a forcible contrast is thereby presented to the fate of the "rebellious" in ver. 6. They dwell in a burnt-up land; but, if they fling away their enmity, may be guests of God in His sanctuary. Thus the first half of the psalm closes with grand prophetic hopes that, when God has established His abode on Zion, distant nations shall bring their tribute, rebels return to allegiance, and men be dwellers with God in His house.

In such anticipations the psalm is Messianic, inasmuch as these are only fulfilled in the dominion of Jesus. Paul's quotation of this verse in Eph. iv. 8 does not require us to maintain its directly prophetic character. Rather, the apostle, as Calvin says, "deflects" it to Christ. That ascent of the ark to Zion was a type rather than a prophecy. Conflict, conquest, triumphant ascent to a lofty home, tribute, widespread submission, and access for rebels to the royal presence—all these, which the psalmist saw as facts or hopes in their earthly form, are repeated in loftier fashion in Christ, or are only attainable through His universal reign. The apostle significantly alters "received among" into "gave to," sufficiently showing that he is not arguing

from a verbal prophecy, but from a typical fact, and bringing out the two great truths, that, in the highest manifestation of the conquering God, the conquered receive gifts from the victor, and that the gifts which the ascended Christ bestows are really the trophies of His battle, in which He bound the strong man and spoiled his house. The attempt to make out that the Hebrew word has the extraordinary doubled-barrelled meaning of *receiving in order to give* is futile, and obscures the intentional freedom with which the apostle deals with the text. The Ascension is, in the fullest sense, the enthronement of God; and its results are the growing submission of nations and the happy dwelling of even the rebellious in His house.

The rapturous emphasis with which this psalm celebrates God's entrance into His sanctuary is most appropriate to Davidic times.

The psalm reaches its climax in God's enthronement on Zion. Its subsequent strophes set forth the results thereof. The first of these, the fifth of the psalm (vv. 19–23), suddenly drops from strains of exultation to a plaintive note, and then again as suddenly breaks out into stern rejoicing over the ruin of the foe. There is wonderful depth of insight and tenderness in laying side by side the two thoughts of God, that He sits on high as conqueror, and that He daily bears our burdens, or perhaps bears us as a shepherd might his lambs.

Truly a Divine use for Divine might! To such lowly offices of continual individualising care will the Master of many legions stoop, reaching out from amid their innumerable myriads to sustain a poor weak man stumbling under a load too great for him. Israel had been delivered by a high hand, but still was burdened. The psalmist has been recalling the deeds of old, and

he finds in them grounds for calm assurance as to the present. To-day, he thinks, is as full of God as any yesterday, and our "burdens" as certain to be borne by Him, as were those of the generation that saw His Sinai tremble at His presence. To us, as to them, He is "a God of deliverances," and for us can provide ways of escape from death. The words breathe a somewhat plaintive sense of need, such as shades our brightest moments, if we bethink ourselves; but they do not oblige us to suppose that the psalm is the product of a time of oppression and dejection. That theory is contradicted by the bounding gladness of the former part, no less than by the confident anticipations of the second half. But no song sung by mortal lips is true to the singer's condition, if it lacks the minor key into which this hymn of triumph is here modulated for a moment.

It is but for a moment, and what follows is startlingly different. Israel's escape from death is secured by the destruction of the enemy, and in it the psalmist has joy. He pictures the hand that sustained him and his fellows so tenderly, shattering the heads of the rebellious. These are described as long-haired, an emblem of strength and insolence which one is almost tempted to connect with Absalom; and the same idea of determined and flaunting sin is conveyed by the expression "goes on in his guiltinesses." There will be such rebels, even though the house of God is open for them to dwell in, and there can be but one end for such. If they do not submit, they will be crushed. The psalmist is as sure of that as of God's gentleness; and his two clauses do state the alternative that every man has to face—either to let God bear his burden or to be smitten by Him.

Vv. 22, 23, give a terrible picture of the end of the rebels. The psalmist hears the voice of the Lord promising to bring some unnamed fugitives from Bashan and the depths of the sea in order that they may be slain, and that he (or Israel) may bathe his foot in their blood, and his dogs may lick it, as they did Ahab's. Who are to be brought back? Some have thought that the promise referred to Israel, but it is more natural to apply it to the flying foe. There is no reference to Bashan either as the kingdom of an ancient enemy or as envying Zion (ver. 15). But the high land of Bashan in the east and the depths of the sea to the west are taken (*cf.* Amos ix. 1–3) as representing the farthest and most inaccessible hiding-places. Wherever the enemies lurk, thence they will be dragged and slain.

The existing text is probably to be amended by the change of one letter in the verb, so as to read "shall wash" or bathe, as in Psalm lviii. 10, and the last clause to be read, "That the tongue of thy dogs may have its portion from the enemy." The blood runs ankle-deep, and the dogs feast on the carcasses or lick it—a dreadful picture of slaughter and fierce triumph. It is not to be softened or spiritualised or explained away.

There is, no doubt, a legitimate Christian joy in the fall of opposition to Christ's kingdom, and the purest benevolence has sometimes a right to be glad when hoary oppressions are swept away and their victims set free; but such rejoicing is not after the Christian law unless it is mingled with pity, of which the psalm has no trace.

The next strophe (vv. 24–27) is by some regarded as resuming the description of the procession, which is supposed to have been interrupted by the preceding

strophe. But the joyous march now to be described is altogether separate from the majestic progress of the conquering King in vv. 17, 18. This is the consequence of that. God has gone into His sanctuary. His people have seen His solemn entrance thither, and therefore they now go up to meet Him there with song and music. Their festal procession is the second result of His enthronement, of which the deliverance and triumph described in the preceding strophe were the first. The people escaped from death flock to thank their Deliverer. Such seems to be the connection of the whole, and especially of vv. 24, 25. Instead of myriads of angels surrounding the conquering God, here are singers and flute-players and damsels beating their timbrels, like Miriam and her choir. Their shrill call in ver. 26 summons all who "spring from the fountain of Israel"—*i.e.*, from the eponymous patriarch—to bless God. After these musicians and singers, the psalmist sees tribe after tribe go up to the sanctuary, and points to each as it passes. His enumeration is not free from difficulties, both in regard to the epithets employed and the specification of the tribes. The meaning of the word rendered "ruler" is disputed. Its form is peculiar, and the meaning of the verb from which it is generally taken to come is rather to *subdue* or *tread down* than to *rule*. If the signification of *ruler* is accepted, a question rises as to the sense in which Benjamin is so called. Allusion to Saul's belonging to that tribe is thought of by some; but this seems improbable, whether the psalm is Davidic or later. Others think that the allusion is to the fact that, according to Joshua xviii. 16, the Temple was within Benjamite territory; but that is a far-fetched explanation. Others confine the "rule" to the procession, in which

Benjamin marches at the head, and so may be called its leader; but ruling and leading are not the same. Others get a similar result by a very slight textual change, reading "in front" instead of "their ruler." Another difficulty is in the word rendered above "their shouting multitude," which can only be made to mean a company of people by a somewhat violent twist. Hupfeld (with whom Bickell and Cheyne agree) proposes an alteration which yields the former sense and is easy. It may be tentatively adopted.

A more important question is the reason for the selection of the four tribes named. The mention of Benjamin and Judah is natural; but why are Zebulun and Naphtali the only representatives of the other tribes? The defenders of a late date answer, as has been already noticed, Because in the late period when the psalm was written, Galilee and Judæa "formed the two orthodox provinces." The objection to this is that in the post-exilic period there were no distinct tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, and no princes to rule.

The mention of these tribes as sharing in the procession to the sanctuary on Zion would have been impossible during the period of the northern kingdom. If, then, these two periods are excluded, what is left but the Davidic? The fact seems to be that we have here another glance at Deborah's song, in which the daring valour of these two tribes is set in contrast with the sluggish cowardice of Reuben and the other northern ones. Those who had done their part in the wars of the Lord now go up in triumph to His house. That is the reward of God's faithful soldiers.

The next strophe (vv. 28–31) is the prayer of the procession. It falls into two parts of two verses each, of which the former verse is petition, and the latter

confident anticipation of the results of answered prayer The symmetry of the whole requires the substitution in ver. 28 of "command" for "hath commanded." God's strength is poetically regarded as distinct from Himself and almost personified, as "loving-kindness" is in Psalm xlii. 8. The prayer is substantially equivalent to the following petition in ver. 28 *b*. Note how "strength" occurs four times in vv. 33-35. The prayer for its present manifestation is, in accordance with the historical retrospect of the first part, based upon God's past acts. It has been proposed to detach "From Thy Temple" from ver. 29, and to attach it to ver. 28. This gets over a difficulty, but unduly abbreviates ver. 29, and is not in harmony with the representation in the former part, which magnifies what God has wrought, not "from the Temple," but in His progress thither. No doubt the retention of the words in ver. 29 introduces a singular expression there. How can presents be brought to God "from Thy Temple"? The only explanation is that "Temple" is used in a restricted sense for the "holy place," as distinguished from the "holy of holies," in which the ark was contained. The tribute-bearers stand in that outer sanctuary, and thence present their tokens of fealty. The city is clustered round the Temple mount, and therefore the psalm says, "Thy Temple above Jerusalem." One is tempted to read "unto" instead of "from"; for this explanation can scarcely be called quite satisfactory. But it seems the best that has been suggested. The submission of kings of unnamed lands is contemplated as the result of God's manifestation of strength for Israel. Ver. 30 resumes the tone of petition, and maintains it throughout. "The beast of the reeds," probably the crocodile, is a poetic

designation for Egypt, the reference to which is claimed by both the defenders of the Davidic and of the post-exilic date as in their favour. The former say that, in David's day, Egypt was the greatest world-power known to the Hebrews; and the latter, that the mention of it points to the time when Israel lay exposed to the attacks of Seleucidæ on the one hand and of Ptolemies on the other. Why, then, should only one of the two hostile neighbours be mentioned here? "Bulls" are a standing emblem of leaders of nations, and "calves" are accordingly their subjects. The two metaphors are naturally connected, and the correction "leaders of the peoples" is unnecessary, and a prosaic intermingling of figure and fact.

Ver. 30*c* is extremely obscure. Baethgen roundly says, "The meaning of the words can no longer be ascertained, and in all probability they are corrupt." The first word is a participle, which is variously taken as meaning "casting oneself to the ground" (*i.e.*, in submission), and "trampling to the ground." It is also variously referred to the nations and their leaders spoken of in the previous verse, and to God. In the former case it would describe their attitude of submission in consequence of "rebuke"; in the latter, God's subjugation of them. The slightest change would make the word an imperative, thus bringing it into line with "rebuke"; but, even without this, the reference to God is apparently to be preferred. The structure of the strophe which, in the first verse of each pair, seems to put petitions and to confine its descriptions of the resulting subjugation of the enemy to the second verse in each case, favours the latter interpretation. The next words are also disputed. One rendering is, "with bars of silver"; another,

"those that delight in silver." The former presupposes a very unusual word for "bars." It is necessarily adopted by those who refer the first word to the submission of the "herd of bulls." The enemies come with tribute of silver. The other rendering, which avoids the necessity of bringing in an otherwise unknown word, is necessarily preferred by the supporters of the second explanation of the preceding word. God is implored to crush "those who delight in silver," which may stand for a description of men of this world, but must be acknowledged to be rather a singular way of designating active enemies of God and Israel. Cheyne's rendering, "That rolls itself in mire for gain of money," brings in the mercenaries of the Seleucidæ. But "rolling oneself in mire" is a strange way of saying "hiring oneself out to fight." Certainty seems unattainable, and we must be content with the general trend of the verse as supplication for an exhibition of God's strength against proud opponents. The last clause sums up the whole in the petition, "Scatter the peoples that delight in wars."

One verse then tells what the result of that will be. "Great ones" shall come from the land of the beast of the reeds, and Ethiopia shall make haste to stretch out tribute-bearing hands to God. The vision of a world subjugated and loving its subjugation is rising before the poet. That is the end of the ways of God with Israel. So deeply had this psalmist been led into comprehension of the Divine purpose; so clearly was he given to see the future, "and all the wonder that should be."

Therefore he breaks forth, in the last strophe, into invocation to all the kingdoms of the earth to sing to God. He had sung of His majesty as of old Jehovah

"rode through the deserts"; and that phrase described His intervention in the field of history on behalf of Israel. Now the singer calls for praise from all the earth to Him who rides in the "most ancient heavens"; and that expression sets forth His transcendent majesty and eternal, universal sway. The psalmist had hymned the victory won when "God gave the word." Now he bids earth listen as "He gives His voice, a voice of strength," which moves and controls all creatures and events. Therefore all nations are summoned to give strength to God, who gives all fulnesses of strength to His people. The psalm closes with the utterance of the thought which has animated it throughout—that God's deeds for and in Israel are the manifestation for the world of His power, and that these will one day lead all men to bless the God of Israel, who shines out in dread majesty from the sanctuary, which is henceforth His abode for evermore.

PSALM LXIX.

1 Save me, O God;
For the waters have come in even to [my] soul.
2 I am sunk in the mud of an abyss, without standing-ground
I am come into depths of waters, and a flood has overwhelmed me.
3 I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched,
My eyes fail whilst I wait for my God.
4 More than the hairs of my head are they who hate me without provocation.
Strong are my destroyers, my enemies wrongfully.
What I did not rob, then I must restore.
5 O God, Thou, Thou knowest my folly,
And my guiltinesses are not hidden from Thee.
6 Let not those who wait for Thee be put to shame through me, Lord, Jehovah of hosts:
Let not those be confounded through me who seek Thee, O God of Israel.

7 For Thy sake have I borne reproach;
Confusion has covered my face.
8 I have become a stranger to my brothers,
And an alien to my mother's sons.
9 For zeal for Thine house has consumed me,
And the reproaches of those that reproach Thee have fallen upon me.
10 And I wept, in fasting my soul [wept];
And that became [matter of] reproaches to me.
11 Also I made sackcloth my clothing;
And I became to them a proverb.
12 They who sit at the gate talk of me,
And the songs of the quaffers of strong drink [are about me].

13 But as for me, my prayer is unto Thee, Jehovah, in a time of favour,
O God, in the greatness of Thy loving-kindness,
Answer me in the troth of Thy salvation.

14 Deliver me from [the] mire, that I sink not,
Rescue me from those who hate me, and from depths of waters.
15 Let not the flood of waters overwhelm me,
And let not the abyss swallow me,
And let not [the] pit close her mouth over me.
16 Answer me, Jehovah; for Thy loving-kindness is good:
In the multitude of Thy compassions turn toward me.
17 And hide not Thy face from Thy servant,
For I am in straits; answer me speedily.
18 Draw near to my soul, redeem it,
Because of my enemies set me free.

19 Thou, Thou knowest my reproach, and my shame, and my confusion.
Before Thee are all my adversaries.
20 Reproach has broken my heart; and I am sick unto death,
And I looked for pitying, and there was none,
And for comforters, and found none.
21 But they gave me gall for my food,
And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

22 Let their table become before them a snare,
And to them in their peacefulness, [let it become] a trap.
23 Darkened be their eyes, that they see not,
And make their loins continually to quake.
24 Pour out upon them Thine indignation,
And let the glow of Thy wrath overtake them.
25 May their encampment be desolate!
In their tents may there be no dweller!
26 For him whom Thou, Thou hast smitten, they persecute,
And they tell of the pain of Thy wounded ones.
27 Add iniquity to their iniquity,
And let them not come into Thy righteousness.
28 Let them be blotted out of the book of the living,
And let them not be inscribed with the righteous.

29 But as for me, I am afflicted and pained,
Let Thy salvation, O God, set me on high.
30 I will praise the name of God in a song,
And I will magnify it with thanksgiving.
31 And it shall please Jehovah more than an ox,
A bullock horned and hoofed.

32 The afflicted see it; they shall rejoice,
Ye who seek God, [behold,] and let your heart live.

33 For Jehovah listens to the needy,
And His captives He does not despise.
34 Let heaven and earth praise Him,
The seas, and all that moves in them.
35 For God will save Zion, and build the cities of Judah,
And they shall dwell there, and possess it.
36 And the seed of His servants shall inherit it,
And those who love His name shall abide therein.

THE Davidic authorship of this psalm is evidently untenable, if for no other reason, yet because of the state of things presupposed in ver. 35. The supposition that Jeremiah was the author has more in its favour than in the case of many of the modern attributions of psalms to him, even if, as seems most probable, the references to sinking in deep mire and the like are metaphorical. Cheyne fixes on the period preceding Nehemiah's first journey to Jerusalem as the earliest possible date for this psalm and its kindred ones (xxii., xxxv., and xl. 13–18). Baethgen follows Olshausen in assigning the psalm to the Maccabean period. The one point which seems absolutely certain is that David was not its author.

It falls into two equal parts (vv. 1–18 and 19–36). In the former part three turns of thought or feeling may be traced: vv. 1–6 being mainly a cry for Divine help, with plaintive spreading out of the psalmist's extremity of need; vv. 7–12 basing the prayer on the fact that his sufferings flow from his religion; and vv. 13–18 being a stream of petitions for deliverance, with continuous allusion to the description of his trials in vv. 1–6. The second part (vv. 19–36) begins with renewed description of the psalmist's affliction (vv. 19–21), and thence passes to invocation of God's justice on his foes (vv. 22–28), which takes the place of the direct petitions for deliverance in the

first part. The whole closes with trustful anticipation of answers to prayer, which will call forth praise from ever-widening circles,—first from the psalmist himself; then from the oppressed righteous; and, finally, from heaven, earth, and sea.

The numerous citations of this psalm in the New Testament have led many commentators to maintain its directly Messianic character. But its confessions of sin and imprecations of vengeance are equally incompatible with that view. It is Messianic as typical rather than as prophetic, exhibiting a history, whether of king, prophet, righteous man, or personified nation, in which the same principles are at work as are manifest in their supreme energy and highest form in the Prince of righteous sufferers. But the correspondence of such a detail as giving gall and vinegar, with the history of Jesus, carries us beyond the region of types, and is a witness that God's Spirit shaped the utterances of the psalmist for a purpose unknown to himself, and worked in like manner on the rude soldiers, whose clumsy mockery and clumsy kindness fulfilled ancient words. There is surely something more here than coincidence or similarity between the experience of one righteous sufferer and another. If Jesus cried "I thirst" in order to bring about the "fulfilment" of one verse of our psalm, His doing so is of a piece with some other acts of His which were distinct claims to be the Messiah of prophecy; but His wish could not influence the soldiers to fulfil the psalm.

The first note is petition and spreading out of the piteous story of the psalmist's need. The burdened heart finds some ease in describing how heavy its burden is, and the devout heart receives some foretaste of longed-for help in the act of telling God how sorely

His help is needed. He who knows all our trouble is glad to have us tell it to Him, since it is thereby lightened, and our faith in Him is thereby increased. Sins confessed are wholly cancelled, and troubles spoken to God are more than half calmed. The psalmist begins with metaphors in vv. 1, 2, and translates these into grim prose in vv. 3, 4, and then, with acknowledgment of sinfulness, cries for God's intervention in vv. 5, 6. It is flat and prosaic to take the expressions in vv. 1, 2, literally, as if they described an experience like Jeremiah's in the miry pit. Nor can the literal application be carried through; for the image of "waters coming in unto the soul" brings up an entirely different set of circumstances from that of sinking in mud in a pit. The one describes trouble as rushing in upon a man, like a deluge which has burst its banks and overwhelms him; the other paints it as yielding and tenacious, affording no firm spot to stand on, but sucking him up in its filthy, stifling slime. No water was in Jeremiah's pit. The two figures are incompatible in reality, and can only be blended in imagination. What they mean is put without metaphor in vv. 3, 4. The psalmist is "weary with calling" on God; his throat is dry with much prayer; his eyes ache and are dim with upward gazing for help which lingers. Yet he does not cease to call, and still prays with his parched throat, and keeps the weary eyes steadfastly fixed, as the psalm shows. It is no small triumph of patient faith to wait for tarrying help. Ver. 4 tells why he thus cries. He is compassed by a crowd of enemies. Two things especially characterise these—their numbers, and their gratuitous hatred. As to the former, they are described as more numerous than the hairs of the psalmist's head. The parallelism of clauses recommends

the textual alteration which substitutes for the unnecessary word "my destroyers" the appropriate expression "more than my bones," which is found in some old versions. Causeless hatred is the portion of the righteous in all ages; and our Lord points to Himself as experiencing it in utmost measure (John xv. 25), inasmuch as He, the perfectly righteous One, must take into His own history all the bitterness which is infused into the cup of those who fear God and love the right by a generation who are out of sympathy with them.

The same experience, in forms varying according to the spirit of the times, is realised still in all who have the mind of Christ in them. As long as the world is a world, it will have some contempt mingling with its constrained respect for goodness, some hostility, now expressed by light shafts of mockery and ridicule, now by heavier and more hurtful missiles, for Christ's true servants. The ancient "Woe" for those of whom "all men speak well" is in force to-day. The "hatred" is "without a cause," in so far as its cherishers have received no hurt, and its objects desire only their enemies' good; but its cause lies deep in the irreconcilable antagonism of life-principles and aims between those who follow Christ and those who do not.

The psalmist had to bear unjust charges, and to make restitution of what he had never taken. Causeless hatred justified itself by false accusations, and innocence had but to bear silently and to save life at the expense of being robbed in the name of justice.

He turns from enemies to God. But his profession of innocence assumes a touching and unusual form. He does not, as might be expected, say, "Thou knowest my guiltlessness," but, "Thou knowest my foolishness." A true heart, while conscious of innocence in regard

to men, and of having done nothing to evoke their enmity, is, even in the act of searching itself, arrested by the consciousness of its many sins in God's sight, and will confess these the more penitently, because it stands upright before men, and asserts its freedom from all crime against them. In so far as men's hatred is God's instrument, it inflicts merited chastisement. That does not excuse men; but it needs to be acknowledged by the sufferer, if things are to be right between him and God. Then, after such confession, he can pray, as this psalmist does, that God's mercy may deliver him, so that others who, like him, wait on God may not be disheartened or swept from their confidence, by the spectacle of his vain hopes and unanswered cries. The psalmist has a strong consciousness of his representative character, and, as in so many other psalms, thinks that his experience is of wide significance as a witness for God. This consciousness points to something special in his position, whether we find the speciality in his office, or in the supposed personification of the nation, or in poetic consciousness heightened by the sense of being an organ of God's Spirit. In a much inferior degree, the lowliest devout man may feel the same; for there are none whose experiences of God as answering prayer may not be a light of hope to some souls sitting in the dark.

In vv. 7–12 the prayer for deliverance is urged on the ground that the singer's sufferings are the result of his devotion. Psalm xliv. 13–22 may be compared, and Jer. xv. 15 is an even closer parallel. Fasting and sackcloth are mentioned again together in Psalm xxxv. 13; and Lam. iii. 14 and Job xxx. 9 resemble ver. 12 *b*. Surrounded by a godless generation, the psalmist's earnestness of faith and concern for God's

honour made him an object of dislike, a target for drunken ridicule. These broke the strong ties of kindred, and acted as separating forces more strongly than brotherhood did, as a uniting one. "Zeal for God's house" presupposes the existence of the Temple, and also either its neglect or its desecration. That sunken condition of the sanctuary distressed the psalmist more than personal calamity, and it was the departure of Israel from God that made him clothe himself in sackcloth and fast and weep. But so far had deterioration gone that his mourning and its cause supplied materials for tipsy mirth, and his name became a by-word and a butt for malicious gossip. The whole picture is that of the standing experience of the godly among the godless. The Perfect Example of devotion and communion had to pass through these waters where they ran deepest and chilliest, but all who have His Spirit have their share of the same fate.

The last division of this first part (vv. 13–18) begins by setting in strong contrast the psalmist's prayer and the drunkard's song. He is sure that his cry will be heard, and so he calls the present time "a time of favour," and appeals, as often in the Psalter, to the multitude of God's loving-kindnesses and the faithfulness of His promise of salvation. Such a pleading with God on the ground of His manifested character is heard in vv. 13, 16, thus inclosing, as it were, the prayer for deliverance in a wrapping of reminders to God of His own name. The petitions here echo the description of peril in the former part—mire and watery depths—and add another kindred image in that of the "pit shutting her mouth" over the suppliant. He is plunged in a deep dungeon, well-shaped; and if a stone is rolled on to its opening, his last gleam

of daylight will be gone, and he will be buried alive. Beautifully do the pleas from God's character and those from the petitioner's sore need alternate, the latter predominating in vv. 17, 18. His thoughts pass from his own desperate condition to God's mercy, and from God's mercy to his own condition, and he has the reward of faith, in that he finds in his straits reasons for his assurance that this is a time of favour, as well as pleas to urge with God. They make the black backing which turns his soul into a mirror, reflecting God's promises in its trust.

The second part of the psalm (ver. 19 to end) has, like the former, three main divisions. The first of these, like vv. 1–6, is mainly a renewed spreading before God of the psalmist's trouble (vv. 19–21). Rooted sorrows are not plucked up by one effort. This recrudescence of fear breaking in upon the newly won serenity of faith is true to nature. On some parts of our coasts, where a narrow outlet hinders the free run of the tide, a second high water follows the first after an hour or so; and often a similar bar to the flowing away of fears brings them back in full rush after they had begun tc sink. The psalmist had appealed to God's knowledge of His "foolishness" as indorsing his protestations of innocence towards men. He now (ver. 19) appeals to His knowledge of his distresses, as indorsing his pitiful plaints. His soul is too deeply moved now to use metaphors. He speaks no more of mire and flood, but we hear the moan of a broken heart, and that wail which sounds sad across the centuries and wakes echoes in many solitary hearts. The psalmist's eyes had failed, while he looked upwards for a God whose coming seemed slow; but they had looked yet more wearily and vainly for human pity and comforters, and found

none. Instead of pity He had received only aggravation of misery. Such seems to be the force of giving gall for food, and vinegar to His thirst. The precise meaning of the word rendered "gall" is uncertain, but the general idea of something bitter is sufficient. That was all that His foes would give Him when hungry; and vinegar, which would make Him more thirsty still, was all that they proffered for His thirst. Such was their sympathy and comforting. According to Matthew, the potion of "wine (or vinegar) mingled with gall" was offered to and rejected by Jesus, before being fastened to the cross. He does not expressly quote the psalm, but probably refers to it. John, on the other hand, does tell us that Jesus, "that the scripture might be accomplished, said, I thirst," and sees its fulfilment in the kindly act of moistening the parched lips. The evangelist's expression does not necessarily imply that a desire to fulfil the scripture was our Lord's motive. Crucifixion was accompanied with torturing thirst, which wrung that last complaint from Jesus. But the evangelist discerns a Divine purpose behind the utterance of Jesus' human weakness; and it is surely less difficult, for any one who believes in supernatural revelation at all, to believe that the words of the psalmist were shaped by a higher power, and the hands of the Roman soldiers moved by another impulse than their own, than to believe that this minute correspondence of psalm and gospel is merely accidental.

But the immediately succeeding section warns us against pushing the Messianic character of the psalm too far, for these fearful imprecations cannot have any analogies in Christ's words (vv. 22–28). The form of the wish in "Let their table become a snare" is explained by remembering that the Eastern table was often a

leather flap laid on the ground, which the psalmist desires may start up as a snare, and close upon the feasters as they sit round it secure. Disease, continual terror, dimmed eyes, paralysed or quaking loins, ruin falling on their homes, and desolation round their encampment, so that they have no descendants, are the least of the evils invoked. The psalmist's desires go further than all this corporeal and material disaster. He prays that iniquity may be added to their iniquity—*i.e.*, that they may be held guilty of sin after sin; and that they may have no portion in God's righteousness—*i.e.*, in the gifts which flow from His adherence to His covenant.

The climax of all these maledictions is that awful wish that the persecutors may be blotted out of the book of life or of the living. True, the high New Testament conception of that book, according to which it is the burgess-roll of the citizens of the New Jerusalem, the possessors of eternal life, does not plainly belong to it in Old Testament usage, in which it means apparently the register of those living on earth. But to blot names therefrom is not only to kill, but to exclude from the national community, and so from all the privileges of the people of God. The psalmist desires for his foes the accumulation of all the ills that flesh is heir to, the extirpation of their families, and their absolute exclusion from the company of the living and the righteous. It is impossible to bring such utterances into harmony with the teachings of Jesus, and the attempt to vindicate them ignores plain facts and does violence to plain words. Better far to let them stand as a monument of the earlier stage of God's progressive revelation, and discern clearly the advance which Christian ethics has made on them.

The psalm ends with glad anticipations of deliverance and vows of thanksgiving. The psalmist is sure that God's salvation will lift him high above his enemies, and as sure that then he will be as grateful as he is now earnest in prayer, and surest of all that his thankful voice will sound sweeter in God's ear than any sacrifice would smell in His nostrils. There is no contempt of sacrifices expressed in "horned and hoofed," but simply the idea of maturity which fits the animal to be offered.

The single voice of praise will be caught up, the singer thinks, by a great chorus of those who would have been struck dumb with confusion if his prayer had not been answered (ver. 6), and who, in like manner, are gladdened by seeing his deliverance. The grace bestowed on one brings thanksgivings from many, which redound to the glory of God. The sudden transition in ver. 32 *b* to direct address to the seekers after God, as if they stood beside the solitary singer, gives vividness to the anticipation. The insertion of "behold" is warranted, and tells what revives the beholders' hearts. The seekers after God feel the pulse of a quicker life throbbing, when they see the wonders wrought through prayer. The singer's thoughts go beyond his own deliverance to that of Israel. "His captives" is most naturally understood as referring to the exiled nation. And this wider manifestation of God's restoring power will evoke praise from a wider circle, even from heaven, earth, and sea. The circumstances contemplated in vv. 33–36 are evidently those of a captivity. God's people are in bondage, the cities of Judah are in ruins, the inhabitants scattered far from their homes. The only reason for taking the closing verses as being a liturgical

addition is unwillingness to admit exilic or post-exilic psalms. But these verses cannot be fairly interpreted without recognising that they presuppose that Israel is in bondage, or at least on the verge of it. The circumstances of Jeremiah's life and times coincide closely with those of the psalmist.

PSALM LXX.*

1 ***O** God*, [be pleased] to deliver me,
Jehovah, hasten to my help.
2 Shamed and put to the blush be the seekers after my soul!
Turned back and dishonoured be they who delight in my calamity!
3 *Let them turn back* by reason of their shame who say, Oho! Oho!
4 Joyful and glad in Thee be all who seek Thee!
And "*God* be magnified" may they ever say who love Thy salvation!
5 But as for me, I am afflicted and needy;
O God, hasten to me:
My help and my deliverer art Thou;
Jehovah, delay not.

THIS psalm is all but identical with the last verses of Psalm xl. 13–17. Some unimportant alterations have been made, principally in the Divine names; but the principle on which they have been made is not obvious. It is scarcely correct to say, with Delitzsch, that the psalm "has been transformed, so as to become Elohistic"; for though it twice replaces the name of Jehovah with that of God (vv. 1, 4), it makes the converse change in ver. 5, last clause, by reading Jehovah instead of "God," as in Psalm xl.

Other changes are of little moment. The principal are in vv. 3 and 5. In the former the vehement wish that the psalmist's mockers may be *paralysed with shame*

* Italics show variations from Psalm xl.

is softened down into a desire that they may be *turned back*. The two verbs are similar in sound, and the substitution may have been accidental, a slip of memory or a defect in hearing, or it may have been an artistic variation of the original. In ver. 5 a prayer that God will hasten to the psalmist's help takes the place of an expression of confidence that "Jehovah purposes [good]" to him, and again there is similarity of sound in the two words. This change is like the subtle alteration which a painter might make on his picture by taking out one spot of high light. The gleam of confidence is changed to a call of need, and the tone of the whole psalm is thereby made more plaintive.

Hupfeld holds that this psalm is the original, and Psalm xl. a composite; but most commentators agree in regarding this as a fragment of that psalm. The cut has not been very cleanly made; for the necessary verb "be pleased" has been left behind, and the symmetry of ver. 1 is destroyed for want of it. The awkward incompleteness of this beginning witnesses that the psalm is a fragment.

PSALM LXXI.

1 In Thee, Jehovah, do I take refuge,
Let me not be put to shame for ever.
2 In Thy righteousness deliver me and rescue me,
Bend Thine ear and save me.
3 Be to me for a rock of habitation to go to continually:
Thou hast commanded to save me,
For my rock and my fortress art Thou.

4 My God, rescue me from the hand of the wicked,
From the fist of the evil-doer and the violent man.
5 For Thou [art] my hope,
O Lord Jehovah, [Thou art] my trust from my youth.
6 On Thee have I been stayed from the womb,
From my mother's bowels Thou hast been my protector:
Of Thee is my praise continually.

7 As a wonder am I become to many,
But Thou art my refuge—a strong one.
8 My mouth is filled with Thy praise,
All the day with Thine honour.
9 Cast me not away in the time of old age,
When my strength fails, forsake me not.

10 For mine enemies speak concerning me,
And the watchers of my soul consult together,
11 Saying, God has left him,
Chase and seize him; for there is no deliverer.
12 O God, be not far from me,
My God, haste to my help.

13 Ashamed, confounded, be the adversaries of my soul,
Covered with reproach and confusion be those who seek my hurt.

14 But as for me, continually will I hope,
And add to all Thy praise.
15 My mouth shall recount Thy righteousness,
All the day Thy salvation,
For I know not the numbers [thereof].

16 I will come with the mighty deeds of the Lord Jehovah,
I will celebrate Thy righteousness, [even] Thine only.
17 O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth,
And up till now I declare Thy wonders.
18 And even to old age and grey hairs,
O God, forsake me not,
Till I declare Thine arm to [the next] generation,
To all who shall come Thy power.
19 And Thy righteousness, O God, [reaches] to the height,
O Thou who hast done great things,
Who is like Thee?
20 Thou who hast made us see straits many and sore,
Thou wilt revive us again,
And from the abysses of the earth will bring us up again.
21 Thou wilt increase my greatness,
And wilt turn to comfort me.

22 Also I will thank Thee with the lyre, [even] Thy troth, my God,
I will harp unto Thee with the harp, Thou Holy One of Israel.
23 My lips shall sing aloud when I harp unto Thee,
And my soul, which Thou hast redeemed.
24 Also my tongue shall all the day muse on Thy righteousness,
For shamed, for put to the blush, are they that seek my hurt.

ECHOES of former psalms make the staple of this one, and even those parts of it which are not quotations have little individuality. The themes are familiar, and the expression of them is scarcely less so. There is no well-defined strophical structure, and little continuity of thought or feeling. Vv. 13 and 24 *b* serve as a kind of partial refrain, and may be taken as dividing the psalm into two parts, but there is little difference between the contents of the two. Delitzsch gives in his adhesion to the hypothesis that Jeremiah was the author; and there is considerable weight in the reasons assigned for that ascription of authorship. The pensive, plaintive tone; the abundant quotations, with slight alterations of the passages cited; the autobiographical hints which fit in with Jeremiah's history,

are the chief of these. But they can scarcely be called conclusive. There is more to be said for the supposition that the singer is the personified nation in this case than in many others. The sudden transition to "us" in ver. 20, which the Massoretic marginal correction corrects into "me," favours, though it does not absolutely require, that view, which is also supported by the frequent allusion to "youth" and "old age." These, however, are capable of a worthy meaning, if referring to an individual. Vv. 1–3 are slightly varied from Psalm xxxi. 1–3. The character of the changes will be best appreciated by setting the two passages side by side.

PSALM XXXI.	PSALM LXXI.
1 In Thee, Jehovah, do I take refuge; let me not be ashamed for ever:	1 In Thee, Jehovah, do I take refuge:
In Thy righteousness rescue me.	Let me not be put to shame for ever.
2*a* Bend Thine ear to me; deliver me speedily.	2 In Thy righteousness deliver me and rescue me:
	Bend Thine ear and save me.

The two verbs, which in the former psalm are in separate clauses ("deliver" and "rescue"), are here brought together. "Speedily" is omitted, and "save" is substituted for "deliver," which has been drawn into the preceding clause. Obviously no difference of meaning is intended to be conveyed, and the changes look very like the inaccuracies of memoriter quotations. The next variation is as follows:—

PSALM XXXI.	PSALM LXXI.
2*b* Be to me for a strong rock, for a house of defence to save me.	3 Be to me for a rock of habitation to go to continually:
3 For my rock and my fortress art Thou.	Thou hast commanded to save me;
	For my rock and my fortress art Thou.

The difference between "a strong rock" and "rock of habitation" is but one letter. That between "for a house of defence" and "to go to continually: Thou hast commanded" is extremely slight, as Baethgen has well shown. Possibly both of these variations are due to textual corruption, but more probably this psalmist intentionally altered the words of an older psalm. Most of the old versions have the existing text, but the LXX. seems to have read the Hebrew here as in Psalm xxxi. The changes are not important, but they are significant. That thought of God as a habitation to which the soul may continually find access goes very deep into the secrets of the devout life. The variation in ver. 3 is recommended by observing the frequent recurrence of "continually" in this psalm, of which that word may almost be said to be the motto. Nor is the thought of God's command given to His multitude of unnamed servants, to save this poor man, one which we can afford to lose.

Vv. 5, 6, are a similar variation of Psalm xxii. 9, 10. "On Thee have I been stayed from the womb," says this psalmist; "On Thee was I cast from the womb," says the original passage. The variation beautifully brings out, not only reliance on God, but the Divine response to that reliance by life-long upholding. That strong arm answers leaning weakness with firm support, and whosoever relies on it is upheld by it. The word rendered above "protector" is doubtful. It is substituted for that in Psalm xxii. 9 which means "One that takes out," and some commentators would attach the same meaning to the word used here, referring it to God's goodness before and at birth. But it is better taken as equivalent to benefactor, provider, or some such designation, and as referring to God's lifelong care.

The psalmist has been "a wonder" to many spectators, either in the sense that they have gazed astonished at God's goodness, or, as accords better with the adversative character of the next clause ("But Thou art my refuge"), that his sufferings have been unexampled. Both ideas may well be combined, for the life of every man, if rightly studied, is full of miracles both of mercy and judgment. If the psalm is the voice of an individual, the natural conclusion from such words is that his life was conspicuous; but it is obvious that the national reference is appropriate here.

On this thankful retrospect of life-long help and life-long trust the psalm builds a prayer for future protection from eager enemies, who think that the charmed life is vulnerable at last.

Vv. 9–13 rise to a height of emotion above the level of the rest of the psalm. On one hypothesis, we have in them the cry of an old man, whose strength diminishes as his dangers increase. Something undisclosed in his circumstances gave colour to the greedy hopes of his enemies. Often prosperous careers are overclouded at the end, and the piteous spectacle is seen of age overtaken by tempests which its feebleness cannot resist, and which are all the worse to face because of the calms preceding them. On the national hypothesis, the psalm is the prayer of Israel at a late stage of its history, from which it looks back to the miracles of old, and then to the ring of enemies rejoicing over its apparent weakness, and then upwards to the Eternal Helper.

Vv. 12, 13, are woven out of other psalms. 12 *a*, "Be not far from me," is found in xxii. 11, 19; xxxv. 22; xxxviii. 21, etc. "Haste to my help" is found in xxxviii. 22; xl. 13 (lxx. 1). For ver. 13 compare

xxxv. 4, 26; xl. 14 (lxx. 2). With this, as a sort of refrain, the first part of the psalm ends.

The second part goes over substantially the same ground, but with lighter heart. The confidence of deliverance is more vivid, and it, as well as the vow of praise following thereon, bulk larger. The singer has thinned away his anxieties by speaking them to God, and has by the same process solidified his faith. Aged eyes should see God, the helper, more clearly when earth begins to look grey and dim. The forward look of such finds little to stay it on this side of heaven. As there seems less and less to hope for here, there should be more and more there. Youth is the time for buoyant anticipation, according to the world's notions, but age may have far brighter lights ahead than youth had leisure to see. "I will hope always" becomes sublime from aged lips, which are so often shaped to say, "I have nothing left to hope for now."

This psalmist's words may well be a pattern for old men, who need fear no failure of buoyancy, nor any collapse of gladness, if they will fix their thoughts where this singer did his. Other subjects of thought and speech will pall and run dry; but he whose theme is God's righteousness and the salvation that flows from it will never lack materials for animating meditation and grateful praise. "I know not the numbers thereof." It is something to have fast hold of an inexhaustible subject. It will keep an old man young.

The psalmist recognises his task, which is also his joy, to declare God's wondrous works, and prays for God's help till he has discharged it. The consciousness of a vocation to speak to later generations inspires him, and assures him that he is immortal till his work is done. His anticipations have been fulfilled

beyond his knowledge. His words will last as long as the world. But men with narrower spheres may be animated by the same consciousness, and they who have rightly understood the purpose of God's mercies to themselves will, like the psalmist, recognise in their own participation in His salvation an imperative command to make it known, and an assurance that nothing shall by any means harm them till they have fulfilled their witnessing. A many-wintered saint should be a convincing witness for God.

Ver. 20, with its sudden transition to the plural, may simply show that the singer passes out from individual contemplation to the consciousness of the multitude of fellow-sufferers and fellow-participants in God's mercy. Such transition is natural; for the most private passages of a good man's communion with God are swift to bring up the thought of others like-minded and similarly blessed. "Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising." Every solo swells into a chorus. Again the song returns to "my" and "me," the confidence of the single soul being reinvigorated by the thought of sharers in blessing.

So all ends with the certainty of, and the vow of praise for, deliverances already realised in faith, though not in fact. But the imitative character of the psalm is maintained even in this last triumphant vow; for ver. 24 *a* is almost identical with xxxv. 28; and *b*, as has been already pointed out, is copied from several other psalms. But imitative words are none the less sincere; and new thankfulness may be run into old moulds, without detriment to its acceptableness to God and preciousness to men.

PSALM LXXII.

1 O God, give Thy judgments to the king,
And Thy righteousness to the king's son.
2 May he judge Thy people with righteousness,
And Thine afflicted with judgment!
3 May the mountains bring forth peace to the people,
And the hills, through righteousness!
4 May he judge the afflicted of the people,
Save the children of the needy,
And crush the oppressor!

5 May they fear Thee as long as the sun shines,
And as long as the moon shows her face, generation after generation!
6 May he come down like rain upon mown pasture,
Like showers—a heavy downpour on the earth!
7 May the righteous flourish in his days,
And abundance of peace, till there be no more a moon!

8 May he have dominion from sea to sea,
And from the River to the ends of the earth!
9 Before him shall the desert peoples bow;
And his enemies shall lick the dust.
10 The kings of Tarshish and the isles shall bring tribute:
The kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts.
11 And all kings shall fall down before him:
All nations shall serve him.

12 For he shall deliver the needy when he cries,
And the afflicted, and him who has no helper.
13 He shall spare the weak and needy,
And the souls of the needy shall he save.
14 From oppression and from violence he shall ransom their soul;
And precious shall their blood be in his eyes.

15 So that he lives and gives to him of the gold of Sheba,
And prays for him continually,
Blesses him all the day.

16 May there be abundance of corn in the earth on the top of the mountains!
May its fruit rustle like Lebanon!
And may [men] spring from the city like grass of the earth!
17 May his name last for ever!
May his name send forth shoots as long as the sun shines,
And may men bless themselves in him,
May all nations pronounce him blessed!

18 Blessed be Jehovah, God, the God of Israel,
Who only doeth wondrous works,
19 And blessed be His glorious name for ever,
And let the whole earth be filled with His glory!
Amen, and Amen.

20 The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.

RIGHTLY or wrongly, the superscription ascribes this psalm to Solomon. Its contents have led several commentators to take the superscription in a meaning for which there is no warrant, as designating the subject, not the author. Clearly, the whole is a prayer for the king; but why should not he be both suppliant and object of supplication? Modern critics reject this as incompatible with the "phraseological evidence," and adduce the difference between the historical Solomon and the ideal of the psalm as negativing reference to him. Ver. 8 is said by them to be quoted from Zech. ix. 10, though Cheyne doubts whether there is borrowing. Ver. 17 *b* is said to be dependent on Gen. xxii. 18, xxvi. 4, which are assumed to be later than the seventh century. Ver. 12 is taken to be a reminiscence of Job xxix. 12, and ver. 16 *b* of Job v. 25. But these are too uncertain criteria to use as conclusive,—partly because coincidence does not

necessarily imply quotation; partly because, quotation being admitted, the delicate question of priority remains, which can rarely be settled by comparison of the passages in question; and partly because, quotation and priority being admitted, the date of the original is still under discussion. The impossibility of Solomon's praying thus for himself does not seem to the present writer so completely established that the hypothesis must be abandoned, especially if the alternative is to be, as Hitzig, followed by Olshausen and Cheyne, proposes, that the king in the psalm is Ptolemy Philadelphus, to whom Psalm xlv. is fitted by the same authorities. Baethgen puts the objections which most will feel to such a theory with studied moderation when he says "that the promises given to the patriarchs in Gen. xxii. 18, xxvi. 4, should be transferred by a pious Israelite to a foreign king appears to me improbable." But another course is open—namely, to admit that the psalm gives no materials for defining its date, beyond the fact that a king of Davidic descent was reigning when it was composed. The authorship may be left uncertain, as may the name of the king for whom such far-reaching blessings were invoked; for he was but a partial embodiment of the kingly idea, and the very disproportion between the reality seen in any Jewish monarch and the lofty idealisms of the psalm compels us to regard the earthly ruler as but a shadow, and the true theme of the singer as being the Messianic King. We are not justified, however, in attempting to transfer every point of the psalmist's prayer to the Messiah. The historical occasion of the psalm is to be kept in mind. A human monarch stands in the foreground; but the aspirations expressed are so far beyond anything that he is or can be, that they are either extravagant

flattery, or reach out beyond their immediate occasion to the King Messiah.

The psalm is not properly a prediction, but a prayer. There is some divergence of opinion as to the proper rendering of the principal verbs,—some, as the A.V. and R.V. (text), taking them as uniformly futures, which is manifestly wrong; some taking them as expressions of wish throughout, which is also questionable; and others recognising pure futures intermingled with petitions, which seems best. The boundaries of the two are difficult to settle, just because the petitions are so confident that they are all but predictions, and the two melt into each other in the singer's mind. The flow of thought is simple. The psalmist's prayers are broadly massed. In vv. 1–4 he prays for the foundation of the king's reign in righteousness, which will bring peace; in vv. 5–7 for its perpetuity, and in vv. 8–11 for its universality; while in vv. 12–15 the ground of both these characteristics is laid in the king's becoming the champion of the oppressed. A final prayer for the increase of his people and the perpetuity and world-wide glory of his name concludes the psalm, to which are appended in vv. 18–20 a doxology, closing the Second Book of the Psalter.

The first petitions of the psalm all ask for one thing for the king—namely, that he should give righteous judgment. They reflect the antique conception of a king as the fountain of justice, himself making and administering law and giving decisions. Thrice in these four verses does "righteousness" occur as the foundation attribute of an ideal king. Caprice, self-interest, and tyrannous injustice were rank in the world's monarchies round the psalmist. Bitter experi-

ence and sad observation had taught him that the first condition of national prosperity was a righteous ruler. These petitions are also animated by the conception, which is as true in the modern as in the ancient world, that righteousness has its seat in the bosom of God, and that earthly judgments are righteous when they conform to and are the echo of His. "Righteousness" is the quality of mind, of which the several "judgments" are the expressions. This king sits on an ancestral throne. His people are God's people. Since, then, he is God's viceroy, the desire cannot be vain that in his heart there may be some reflection of God's righteousness, and that his decisions may accord with God's. One cannot but remember Solomon's prayer for "an understanding heart," that he might judge this people; nor forget how darkly his later reign showed against its bright beginning. A righteous king makes a peaceful people, especially in a despotic monarchy. The sure results of such a reign—which are, likewise, the psalmist's chief reason for his petitions—are set forth in the vivid metaphor of ver. 3, in which peace is regarded as the fruit which springs, by reason of the king's righteousness, from mountains and hills. This psalmist has special fondness for that figure of vegetable growth (vv. 7, 16, 17); and it is especially suitable in this connection, as peace is frequently represented in Scripture as the fruit of righteousness, both in single souls and in a nation's history. The mountains come into view here simply as being the most prominent features of the land, and not, as in ver. 16, with any reference to their barrenness, which would make abundant growth on them more wonderful, and indicative of yet greater abundance on the plains.

A special manifestation of judicial righteousness is

the vindication of the oppressed and the punishment of the oppressor (ver. 4). The word rendered "judge" in ver. 4 differs from that in ver. 2, and is the same from which the name of the "Judges" in Israel is derived. Like them, this king is not only to pronounce decisions, as the word in ver. 2 means, but is to execute justice by acts of deliverance, which smite in order to rescue. Functions which policy and dignity require to be kept apart in the case of earthly rulers are united in the ideal monarch. He executes his own sentences. His acts are decisions. The psalmist has no thought of inferior officers by the king's side. One figure fills his mind and his canvas. Surely such an ideal is either destined to remain for ever a fair dream, or its fulfilment is to be recognised in the historical Person in whom God's righteousness dwelt in higher fashion than psalmists knew, who was, "first, King of righteousness, and then, after that, also King of peace," and who, by His deed, has broken every yoke, and appeared as the defender of all the needy. The poet prayed that Israel's king might perfectly discharge his office by Divine help; the Christian gives thanks that the King of men has been and done all which Israel's monarchs failed to be and do.

The perpetuity of the king's reign and of his subjects' peace is the psalmist's second aspiration (vv. 5–7). The "Thee" of ver. 5 presents a difficulty, as it is doubtful to whom it refers. Throughout the psalm the king is spoken *of*, and never *to*; and if it is further noticed that, in the preceding verses, God has been directly addressed, and "Thy" used thrice in regard to Him, it will appear more natural to take the reference in ver. 5 to be to Him. The fear of God would be diffused among the king's subjects, as a consequence

of his rule in righteousness. Hupfeld takes the word as referring to the king, and suggests changing the text to "him" instead of "Thee"; while others, among whom are Cheyne and Baethgen, follow the track of the LXX. in adopting a reading which may be translated "May he live," or "Prolong his days." But the thought yielded by the existing text, if referred to God, is most natural and worthy. The king is, as it were, the shadow on earth of God's righteousness, and consequently becomes an organ for the manifestation thereof, in such manner as to draw men to true devotion. The psalmist's desires are for something higher than external prosperity, and his conceptions of the kingly office are very sacred. Not only peace and material well-being, but also the fear of Jehovah, are longed for by him to be diffused in Israel. And he prays that these blessings may be perpetual. The connection between the king's righteousness and the fear of God requires that that permanence should belong to both. The cause is as lasting as its effect. Through generation after generation he desires that each shall abide. He uses peculiar expressions for continual duration: "with the sun"—*i.e.*, contemporaneous with that unfading splendour; "before the face of the moon"—*i.e.*, as long as she shines. But could the singer anticipate such length of dominion for any human king? Psalm xxi. has similar language in regard to the same person; and here, as there, it seems sufficiently accounted for by the consideration that, while the psalmist was speaking of an individual, he was thinking of the office rather than of the person, and that the perpetual continuance of the Davidic dynasty, not the undying life of any one representative of it, was meant. The full light of the

truth that there is a king whose royalty, like his priesthood, passes to no other is not to be forced upon the psalm. It stands as a witness that devout and inspired souls longed for the establishment of a kingdom, against which revolutions and enemies and mortality were powerless. They knew not that their desires could not be fulfilled by the longest succession of dying kings, but were to be more than accomplished by One, "of whom it is witnessed that He liveth."

The psalmist turns for a moment from his prayer for the perpetuity of the king's rule, to linger upon the thought of its blessedness as set forth in the lovely image of ver. 6. Rain upon mown grass is no blessing, as every farmer knows; but what is meant is, not the grass which has already been mown, but the naked meadow from which it has been taken. It needs drenching showers, in order to sprout again and produce an aftermath. The poet's eye is caught by the contrast between the bare look of the field immediately after cutting and the rich growth that springs, as by magic, from the yellow roots after a plentiful shower. This king's gracious influences shall fall upon even what seems dead, and charm forth hidden life that will flush the plain with greenness. The psalmist dwells on the picture, reiterating the comparison in ver. 6 *b*, and using there an uncommon word, which seems best rendered as meaning a heavy rainfall. With such affluence of quickening powers will the righteous king bless his people. The "Mirror for Magistrates," which is held up in the lovely poem in 2 Sam. xxiii. 4, has a remarkable parallel in its description of the just ruler as resembling a "morning without clouds, when the tender grass springeth out of the earth through clear shining after rain"; but the

psalmist heightens the metaphor by the introduction of the mown meadow as stimulated to new growth. This image of the rain lingers with him and shapes his prayer in ver. *7 a*. A righteous king will insure prosperity to the righteous, and the number of such will increase. Both these ideas seem to be contained in the figure of their flourishing, which is literally *bud* or *shoot*. And, as the people become more and more prevailingly righteous, they receive more abundant and unbroken peace. The psalmist had seen deeply into the conditions of national prosperity, as well as those of individual tranquillity, when he based these on rectitude.

With ver. 8 the singer takes a still loftier flight, and prays for the universality of the king's dominion. In that verse the form of the verb is that which expresses desire, but in ver. 9 and following verses the verbs may be rendered as simple futures. Confident prayers insensibly melt into assurances of their own fulfilment. As the psalmist pours out his petitions, they glide into prophecies; for they are desires fashioned upon promises, and bear, in their very earnestness, the pledge of their realisation. As to the details of the form which the expectation of universal dominion here takes, it need only be noted that we have to do with a poet, not with a geographer. We are not to treat the expressions as if they were instructions to a boundary commission, and to be laid down upon a map. "The sea" is probably the Mediterranean; but what the other sea which makes the opposite boundary may be is hard to say. Commentators have thought of the Persian Gulf, or of an imaginary ocean encircling the flat earth, according to ancient ideas But more probably the expression is as indeterminate as the parallel one, "the ends of the earth." In the first clause of the verse the psalmist

starts from the Mediterranean, the western boundary, and his anticipations travel away into the unknown eastern regions; while, in the second clause, he begins with the Euphrates, which was the eastern boundary of the dominion promised to Israel, and, coming westward, he passes out in thought to the dim regions beyond. The very impossibility of defining the boundaries declares the boundlessness of the kingdom. The poet's eyes have looked east and west, and in ver. 9 he turns to the south, and sees the desert tribes, unconquered as they have hitherto been, grovelling before the king, and his enemies in abject submission at his feet. The word rendered "desert peoples" is that used in Psalm lxxiv. 14 for wild beasts inhabiting the desert, but here it can only mean *wilderness tribes*. There seems no need to alter the text, as has been proposed, and to read "adversaries." In ver. 10 the psalmist again looks westward, across the mysterious ocean of which he, like all his nation, knew so little. The great city of Tarshish lay for him at the farthest bounds of the world; and between him and it, or perhaps still farther out in the waste unknown, were islands from which rich and strange things sometimes reached Judæa. These shall bring their wealth in token of fealty. Again he looks southward to Sheba in Arabia, and Seba far south below Egypt, and foresees their submission. His knowledge of distant lands is exhausted, and therefore he ceases enumeration, and falls back on comprehensiveness. How little he knew, and how much he believed! His conceptions of the sweep of that "all" were childish; his faith that, however many these unknown kings and nations were, God's anointed was their king was either extravagant exaggeration, or it was nurtured in him by God, and meant to be

fulfilled when a world, wide beyond his dreams and needy beyond his imagination, should own the sway of a King, endowed with God's righteousness and communicative of God's peace, in a manner and measure beyond his desires.

The triumphant swell of these anticipations passes with wonderful pathos into gentler music, as if the softer tones of flutes should follow trumpet blasts. How tenderly and profoundly the psalm bases the universality of the dominion on the pitying care and delivering power of the King! The whole secret of sway over men lies in that "For," which ushers in the gracious picture of the beneficent and tender-hearted Monarch. The world is so full of sorrow, and men are so miserable and needy, that he who can stanch their wounds, solace their griefs, and shelter their lives will win their hearts and be crowned their king. Thrones based on force are as if set on an iceberg which melts away. There is no solid foundation for rule except helpfulness. In the world and for a little while "they that exercise authority are called benefactors"; but in the long-run the terms of the sentence are inverted, and they that are rightly called benefactors exercise authority. The more earthly rulers approximate to this ideal portrait, the more "broad-based upon their people's will" and love will their thrones stand. If Israel's kings had adhered to it, their throne would have endured. But their failures point to Him in whom the principle declared by the psalmist receives its most tender illustration. The universal dominion of Jesus Christ is based upon the fact that He "tasted death for every man." In the Divine purpose, He has won the right to rule men because He has died for them. In historical realisation, He wins men's submission

because He has given Himself for them. Therefore does He command with absolute authority; therefore do we obey with entire submission. His sway not only reaches out over all the earth, inasmuch as the power of His cross extends to all men, but it lays hold of the inmost will and makes submission a delight.

The king is represented in ver. 14 as taking on himself the office of Goel, or Kinsman-Redeemer, and ransoming his subjects' lives from "deceit and violence." That "their blood is precious in his eyes" is another way of saying that they are too dear to him to be suffered to perish. This king's treasure is the life of his subjects. Therefore he will put forth his power to preserve them and deliver them. The result of such tender care and delivering love is set forth in ver. 15, but in obscure language. The ambiguity arises from the absence of expressed subjects for the four verbs in the verse. Who is he who "lives"? Is the same person the giver of the gold of Sheba, and to whom is it given? Who prays, and for whom? And who blesses, and whom does he bless? The plain way of understanding the verse is to suppose that the person spoken of in all the clauses is the same; and then the question comes whether he is the king or the ransomed man. Difficulties arise in carrying out either reference through all the clauses; and hence attempts have been made to vary the subject of the verbs. Delitzsch, for instance, supposes that it is the ransomed man who "lives," the king who gives to the ransomed man gold, and the man who prays for and blesses the king. But such an arbitrary shuttling about of the reference of "he" and "him" is impossible. Other attempts of a similar kind need not be noticed here. The only satisfactory course is to take one person as

spoken of by all the verbs. But then the question comes, Who is he? There is much to be said in favour of either hypothesis as answering that question. The phrase which is rendered above "So that he lives" is so like the common invocation "May the king live," that it strongly favours taking the whole verse as a continuance of the petitions for the monarch. But if so, the verb in the second clause (*he shall give*) must be taken impersonally, as equivalent to "one will give" or "there shall be given," and those in the remaining clauses must be similarly dealt with, or the text altered so as to make them plurals, reading, "They shall pray for him (the king), . . . and shall bless him." On the whole, it is best to suppose that the ransomed man is the subject throughout, and that the verse describes his glad tribute, and continual thankfulness. Ransomed from death, he brings offerings to his deliverer. It seems singular that he should be conceived of both as "needy" and as owning "gold" which he can offer; but in the literal application the incongruity is not sufficient to prevent the adoption of this view of the clause; and in the higher application of the words to Christ and His subjects, which we conceive to be warranted, the incongruity becomes fine and deep truth; for the poorest soul, delivered by Him, can bring tribute, which He esteems as precious beyond all earthly treasure. Nor need the remaining clauses militate against the view that the ransomed man is the subject in them. The psalm had a historical basis, and all its points cannot be introduced into the Messianic interpretation. This one of praying for the king cannot be; notwithstanding the attempts of some commentators to find a meaning for it in Christian prayers for the spread of Christ's kingdom. That explanation

does violence to the language, mistakes the nature of Messianic prophecy, and brings discredit on the view that the psalm has a Messianic character.

The last part of the psalm (vv. 16, 17) recurs to petitions for the growth of the nation and the perpetual flourishing of the king's name. The fertility of the land and the increase of its people are the psalmist's desires, which are also certainties, as expressed in ver. 16. He sees in imagination the whole land waving with abundant harvests, which reach even to the tops of the mountains, and rustle in the summer air, with a sound like the cedars of Lebanon, when they move their layers of greenness to the breeze. The word rendered above "abundance" is doubtful; but there does not seem to be in the psalmist's mind the contrast which he is often supposed to be expressing, beautiful and true as it, is between the small beginnings and the magnificent end of the kingdom on earth. The mountains are here thought of as lofty and barren. If waving harvests clothe their gaunt sides, how will the vales laugh in plentiful crops! As the earth yields her increase, so the people of the king shall be multiplied, and from all his cities they shall spring forth abundant as grass. That figure would bear much expansion; for what could more beautifully set forth rapidity of growth, close-knit community, multiplication of units, and absorption of these in a lovely whole, than the picture of a meadow clothed with its grassy carpet? Such hopes had only partial fulfilment in Israel. Nor have they had adequate fulfilment up till now. But they lie on the horizon of the future, and they shall one day be reached. Much that is dim is treasured in them. There may be a renovated world, from which the curse of barrenness has been banished.

There shall be a swift increase of the subjects of the King, until the earlier hope of the psalm is fulfilled, and all nations shall serve Him.

But bright as are the poet's visions concerning the kingdom, his last gaze is fastened on its king, and he prays that his name may last for ever, and may send forth shoots as long as the sun shines in the sky. He probably meant no more than a prayer for the continual duration of the dynasty, and his conception of the name as sending forth shoots was probably that of its being perpetuated in descendants. But, as has been already noticed, the perpetuity, which he conceived of as belonging to a family and an office, really belongs to the One King, Jesus Christ, whose Name is above every name, and will blossom anew in fresh revelations of its infinite contents, not only while the sun shines, but when its fires are cold and its light quenched. The psalmist's last desire is that the ancient promise to the fathers may be fulfilled in the King, their descendant, in whom men shall bless themselves. So full of blessedness may He seem to all men, that they shall take Him for the very type of felicity, and desire to be even as He is! In men's relation to Christ the phrase assumes a deeper meaning still; and though that is not intended by the psalmist, and is not the exposition of his words, it still is true that in Christ all blessings for humanity are stored, and that therefore if men are to be truly blessed they must plunge themselves into Him, and in Him find all that they need for blessedness and nobility of life and character. If He is our supreme type of whatsoever things are fair and of good report, and if we have bowed ourselves to Him because He has delivered us from death, then we share in His life, and all His blessings are parted among us.

BOOK III.

PSALMS LXXIII.—LXXXIX.

PSALM LXXIII.

1 Surely God is good to Israel,
To those who are pure in heart;
2 But I—within a little of turning aside were my feet,
All but slipping were my steps.

3 For I was envious of the foolish,
When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
4 For they have no bonds [dragging them] to death,
And their body is lusty.
5 In the trouble belonging to frail mortals they have no part,
And [in common] with men they are not smitten.
6 Therefore pride is their necklace;
Violence covers them as a robe.

7 Out of fat their eye flashes;
The imaginations of their heart overflow.
8 They mock and speak wickedly of oppression,
[As] from on high they speak.
9 They set in the heavens their mouth,
And their tongue stalks on the earth.
10 Therefore he turns his people thither,
And waters of abundance are drunk up by them.

11 And they say, How does God know?
And is there knowledge in the Most High?
12 Behold! these are wicked,
And, prosperous for ever, they have increased their wealth.
13 Surely in vain have I cleansed my heart,
And in innocency have washed my hands.
14 Yet have I been smitten all the day,
And my correction [came] every morning.

15 If I had said, I will speak thus,
Behold, I should have been unfaithful to the generation of Thy children.

16 When I gave thought in order to understand this,
It was too difficult in my eyes—
17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God,
And gave heed to their end.
18 Surely in slippery places Thou dost set them;
Thou castest them down to ruins.

19 How are they become a desolation in a moment,
Are ended, consumed with terrors!
20 Like a dream on awaking,
So Lord, on [Thy] arousing, Thou wilt despise their shadowy form.
21 For my heart was growing bitter,
And I was pricked [in] my reins.
22 And I, I was brutish and ignorant,
A [very] beast was I before Thee.

23 And yet I, I am continually with Thee;
Thou hast grasped [me] by my right hand.
24 In Thy counsel Thou wilt guide me,
And afterwards to glory wilt "take" me.
25 Whom have I in heaven?
And, possessing Thee, I have no delight on earth.
26 [Though] my flesh and my heart fail,
The rock of my heart and my portion is God for ever.

27 For, behold, they that are far from Thee shall perish;
Thou hast destroyed every one that goes whoring from Thee.
28 But I, I—to draw near to God is good to me;
I have made in the Lord Jehovah my refuge,
That I may recount all Thy works.

THE perennial problem of reconciling God's moral government with observed facts is grappled with in this psalm, as in Psalms xxxvii. and xlix. It tells how the prosperity of the godless, in apparent flat contradiction of Divine promises, had all but swept the psalmist from his faith, and how he was led, through doubt and struggle, to closer communion with God, in which he learned, not only the evanescence of the external well-being which had so perplexed him, but

the eternity of the true blessedness belonging to the godly. His solution of the problem is in part that of the two psalms just mentioned, but it surpasses them in its clear recognition that the portion of the righteous, which makes their lot supremely blessed, is no mere earthly prosperity, but God Himself, and in its pointing to "glory" which comes afterwards, as one element in the solution of the problem.

The psalm falls into two divisions, in the first of which (vv. 1–14) the psalmist tells of his doubts, and, in the second (vv. 15–28), of his victory over them. The body of the psalm is divided into groups of four verses, and it has an introduction and conclusion of two verses each.

The introduction (vv. 1, 2) asserts, with an accent of assurance, the conviction which the psalmist had all but lost, and therefore had the more truly won. The initial word "Surely" is an indication of his past struggle, when the truth that God was good to Israel had seemed so questionable. "This I have learned by doubts; this I now hold as most sure; this I proclaim, impugn it who list, and seem to contradict it what may." The decisiveness of the psalmist's conviction does not lead him to exaggeration. He does not commit himself to the thesis that outward prosperity attends Israel. That God is good to those who truly bear that name is certain; but how He shows His goodness, and who these are, the psalmist has, by his struggles, learned to conceive of in a more spiritual fashion than before. That goodness may be plainly seen in sorrows, and it is only sealed to those who are what the name of Israel imports—"pure in heart." That such are blessed in possessing God, and that neither are any other blessed, nor is there any other

blessedness, are the lessons which the singer has brought with him from the darkness, and by which the ancient faith of the well-being of the righteous is set on surer foundations than before.

The avowal of conquered doubts follows on this clear note of certitude. There is a tinge of shame in the emphatic "I" of ver. 2, and in the broken construction and the change of subject to "my feet" and "my steps." The psalmist looks back to that dreary time, and sees more clearly than he did, while he was caught in the toils of perplexity and doubt, how narrow had been his escape from casting away his confidence. He shudders as he remembers it; but he can do so now from the vantage-ground of tried and regained faith. How eloquently the order of thought in these two verses speaks of the complete triumph over doubt!

In the first quatrain of verses, the prosperity of the godless, which had been the psalmist's stumbling-block, is described. Two things are specified—physical health, and exemption from calamity. The former is the theme of ver. 4. Its first clause is doubtful. The word rendered "bands" only occurs here and in Isa. lviii. 6. It literally means bands, but may pass into the figurative signification of pains, and is sometimes by some taken in that meaning here, and the whole clause as asserting that the wicked have painless and peaceful deaths. But such a declaration is impossible in the face of vv. 18, 19, which assert the very opposite, and would be out of place at this point of the psalm, which is here occupied with the lives, not the deaths, of the ungodly. Hupfeld translates "They are without pains even until their deaths"; but that rendering puts an unusual sense on the preposition "to," which is not "till." A very plausible conjecture

alters the division of words, splitting the one which means "to their death" (*l'motham*) into two (*lamo tam*), of which the former is attached to the preceding words ("there are no pains *to them*" = "they have no pains"), and the latter to the following clause ("*Sound* and well nourished is," etc.). This suggestion is adopted by Ewald and most modern commentators, and has much in its favour. If the existing text is retained, the rendering above seems best. It describes the prosperous worldling as free from troubles or diseases, which would be like chains on a captive, by which he is dragged to execution. It thus gives a parallel to the next clause, which describes their bodies (lit., belly) as stalwart. Ver. 5 carries on the description, and paints the wicked's exemption from trouble. The first clause is literally, "In the trouble of man they are not." The word for man here is that which connotes frailty and mortality, while in the next clause it is the generic term "Adam." Thus the prosperous worldlings appeared to the psalmist, in his times of scepticism, as possessing charmed lives, which were free from all the ills that came from frailty and mortality, and, as like superior beings, lifted above the universal lot. But what did their exemption do for them? Its effects might have taught the doubter that the prosperity at which his faith staggered was no blessing, for it only inflated its recipients with pride, and urged them on to high-handed acts. Very graphically does ver. 6 paint them as having the former for their necklace, and the latter for their robe. A proud man carries a stiff neck and a high head. Hence the picture in ver. 6 of "pride" as wreathed about their necks as a chain or necklace. High-handed violence is their garment, according to the familiar metaphor by

which a man's characteristics are likened to his dress, the garb of his soul. The double meaning of "habit," and the connection between "custom" and "costume," suggest the same figure. As the clothing wraps the body and is visible to the world, so insolent violence, masterfulness enforced by material weapons and contemptuous of others' rights, characterised these men, who had never learned gentleness in the school of suffering. Tricked out with a necklace of pride and a robe of violence, they strutted among men, and thought themselves far above the herd, and secure from the touch of trouble.

The next group of verses (vv. 7–10) further describes the unfeeling insolence begotten of unbroken prosperity, and the crowd of hangers-on, admirers, and imitators attendant on the successful wicked. "Out of fat their eye flashes" gives a graphic picture of the fierce glare of insolent eyes, set in well-fed faces. But graphic as it is, it scarcely fits the context so well as does a proposed amended reading, which by a very small change in the word rendered "their eye" yields the meaning "their iniquity," and takes "fat" as equivalent to a fat, that is, an obstinate, self-confident, or unfeeling heart. "From an unfeeling heart their iniquity comes forth" makes a perfect parallel with the second clause of the verse rightly rendered, "the imaginations of their heart overflow"; and both clauses paint the arrogant tempers and bearing of the worldlings. Ver. 8 deals with the manifestation of these in speech. Well-to-do wickedness delights in making suffering goodness a butt for its coarse jeers. It does not need much wit to do that. Clumsy jests are easy, and poverty is fair game for vulgar wealth's ridicule. But there is a dash of ferocity in such laughter, and such jests

pass quickly into earnest, and wicked oppression. "As from on high they speak,"—fancying themselves set on a pedestal above the common masses. The LXX., followed by many moderns, attaches "oppression" to the second clause, which makes the verse more symmetrical; but the existing division of clauses yields an appropriate sense.

The description of arrogant speech is carried on in ver. 9, which has been variously understood, as referring in *a* to blasphemy against God ("they set against the heavens their mouth"), and in *b* to slander against men; or, as in *a*, continuing the thought of ver. 8 *b*, and designating their words as spoken as if from heaven itself, and in *b* ascribing to their words sovereign power among men. But it is better to regard "heaven" and "earth" as the ordinary designation of the whole visible frame of things, and to take the verse as describing the self-sufficiency which gives its opinions and lays down the law about everything, and, on the other hand, the currency and influence which are accorded by the popular voice to the dicta of prosperous worldlings.

That thought prepares the way for the enigmatic verse which follows. There are several obscure points in it. First, the verb in the Hebrew text means *turns* (transitive), which the Hebrew margin corrects into *returns* (intransitive). With the former reading, "his people" is the object of the verb, and the implied subject is the prosperous wicked man, the change to the singular "he" from the plural "they" of the preceding clauses being not unusual in Hebrew. With the latter reading, "his people" is the subject. The next question is to whom the "people" are conceived as belonging. It is, at first sight, natural to think of the frequent Scripture

expression, and to take the "his" as referring to God, and the phrase to mean the true Israel. But the meaning seems rather to be the mob of parasites and hangers-on, who servilely follow the successful sinner, in hope of some crumbs from his table. "Thither" means "to himself," and the whole describes how such a one as the man whose portrait has just been drawn is sure to attract a retinue of dependants, who say as he says, and would fain be what he is. The last clause describes the share of these parasites in their patron's prosperity. "Waters of abundance"—*i.e.*, abundant waters—may be an emblem of the pernicious principles of the wicked, which their followers swallow greedily; but it is more probably a figure for fulness of material good, which rewards the humiliation of servile adherents to the prosperous worldling.

The next group (vv. 11–14) begins with an utterance of unbelief or doubt, but it is difficult to reach certainty as to the speakers. It is very natural to refer the "they" to the last-mentioned persons—namely, the people who have been led to attach themselves to the prosperous sinners, and who, by the example of these, are led to question the reality of God's acquaintance with and moral government of human affairs. The question is, as often, in reality a denial. But "they" may have a more general sense, equivalent to our own colloquial use of it for an indefinite multitude. "They say"—that is, "the common opinion and rumour is." So here, the meaning may be, that the sight of such flushed and flourishing wickedness diffuses widespread and deep-going doubts of God's knowledge, and makes many infidels.

Ewald, Delitzsch, and others take all the verses of this group as spoken by the followers of the ungodly;

and, unquestionably, that view avoids the difficulty of allotting the parts to different unnamed interlocutors. But it raises difficulties of another kind—as, for instance, those of supposing that these adulators should roundly call their patrons wicked, and that an apostate should profess that he has cleansed his heart. The same objections do not hold against the view that these four verses are the utterance, not of the wicked rich man or his coterie of admirers, but of the wider number whose faith has been shaken. There is nothing in the verses which would be unnatural on such lips.

Ver. 11 would then be a question anxiously raised by faith that was beginning to reel; ver. 12 would be a statement of the anomalous fact which staggered it; and vv. 13, 14, the complaint of the afflicted godly. The psalmist's repudiation of a share in such incipient scepticism would begin with ver. 15. There is much in favour of this view of the speakers, but against it is the psalmist's acknowledgment, in ver. 2, that his own confidence in God's moral government had been shaken, of which there is no further trace in the psalm, unless vv. 13, 14, express the conclusion which he had been tempted to draw, and which, as he proceeds to say, he had fought down. If these two verses are ascribed to him, ver. 12 is best regarded as a summary of the whole preceding part, and only ver. 11 as the utterance either of the prosperous sinner and his adherents (in which case it is a question which means denial), or as that of troubled faith (in which case it is a question that would fain be an affirmation, but has been forced unwillingly to regard the very pillars of the universe as trembling).

Vv. 15–18 tell how the psalmist strove with and finally conquered his doubts, and saw enough of the

great arc of the Divine dealings, to be sure that the anomaly, which had exercised his faith, was capable of complete reconciliation with the righteousness of Providence. It is instructive to note that he silenced his doubts, out of regard to "the generation of Thy children"—that is, to the true Israel, the pure in heart. He was tempted to speak as others did not fear to speak, impugning God's justice and proclaiming the uselessness of purity; but he locked his lips, lest his words should prove him untrue to the consideration which he owed to meek and simple hearts, who knew nothing of the speculative difficulties torturing him. He does not say that his speaking would have been sin against God. It would not have been so, if, in speaking, he had longed for confirmation of his wavering faith. But whatever the motive of his words, they might have shaken some lowly believers. Therefore he resolved on silence. Like all wise and devout men, he swallowed his own smoke, and let the process of doubting go on to its end of certainty, one way or another, before he spoke. This psalm, in which he tells how he overcame them, is his first acknowledgment that he had had these temptations to cast away his confidence. Fermentation should be done in the dark. When the process is finished, and the product is clear, it is fit to be produced and drank. Certitudes are meant to be uttered; doubts are meant to be struggled with. The psalmist has set an example which many men need to ponder to-day. It is easy, and it is also cruel, to raise questions which the proposer is not ready to answer.

Silent brooding over his problem did not bring light, as ver. 16 tells us. The more he thought over it, the more insoluble did it seem to him. There are chambers

which the key of thinking will not open. Unwelcome as the lesson is, we have to learn that every lock will not yield to even prolonged and strenuous investigation. The lamp of the Understanding throws its beams far, but there are depths of darkness too deep and dark for them; and they are wisest who know its limits and do not try to use it in regions where it is useless.

But faith finds a path where speculation discerns none. The psalmist "went into the sanctuary (literally, sanctuaries) of God," and there light streamed in on him, in which he saw light. Not mere entrance into the place of worship, but closer approach to the God who dwelt there, cleared away the mists. Communion with God solves many problems which thinking leaves unresolved. The eye which has gazed on God is purged for much vision besides. The disproportion between the deserts and fortunes of good and bad men assumes an altogether different aspect when contemplated in the light of present communion with Him, which brings a blessedness that makes earthly prosperity seem dross, and earthly burdens seem feathers. Such communion, in its seclusion from worldly agitations, enables a man to take calmer, saner views of life, and in its enduring blessedness reveals more clearly the transiency of the creatural good which deceives men with the figment of its permanence. The lesson which the psalmist learned in the solemn stillness of the sanctuary was the end of ungodly prosperity. That changes the aspect of the envied position of the prosperous sinner, for his very prosperity is seen to contribute to his downfall, as well as to make that downfall more tragic by contrast. His sure footing, exempt as he seemed from the troubles and ills that flesh is heir to, was really on a treacherous slope, like smooth sheets of rock on a

mountain-side. To stand on them is to slide down to hideous ruin.

The theme of the end of the prosperous sinners is continued in the next group (vv. 19–22). In ver. 19 the psalmist seems as if standing an amazed spectator of the crash, which tumbles into chaos the solid-seeming fabric of their insolent prosperity. An exclamation breaks from his lips as he looks. And then destruction is foretold for all such, under the solemn and magnificent image of ver. 20. God has seemed to sleep, letting evil run its course; but He "rouses Himself"—that is, comes forth in judicial acts—and as a dreamer remembers his dream, which seemed so real, and smiles at its imaginary terrors or joys, so He will "despise" them, as no more solid nor lasting than phantasms of the night. The end contemplated by the psalmist is not necessarily death, but any sudden overthrow, of which there are many in the experience of the godless. Life is full of such awakings of God, both in regard to individuals and nations, which, if a man duly regards, he will find the problem of the psalm less insoluble than at first it appears. But if there are lives which, being without goodness, are also without chastisement, Death comes at last to such as God's awaking, and a very awful dissipating of earthly prosperity into a shadowy nothing.

The psalmist has no revelation here of future retribution. His vindication of God's justice is not based on that, but simply on the transiency of worldly prosperity, and on its dangerous character. It is "a slippery place," and it is sure to come to an end. It is obvious that there are many other considerations which have to be taken into account, in order to a complete solution of the problem of the psalm. But

the psalmist's solution goes far to lighten the painful perplexity of it; and if we add his succeeding thoughts as to the elements of true blessedness, we have solution enough for peaceful acquiescence, if not for entire understanding. The psalmist's way of finding an answer is even more valuable than the answer which he found. They who dwell in the secret place of the Most High can look on the riddle of this painful world with equanimity, and be content to leave it half unsolved.

Vv. 21, 22, are generally taken as one sentence, and translated as by Delitzsch, "If my heart should grow bitter . . . I should be brutish," etc.; or, as by Hupfeld, "When my heart grew bitter . . . then I was as a beast," etc.; but they are better regarded as the psalmist's penitent explanation of his struggle. "Unbelieving thoughts had fermented in his mind, and a pang of passionate discontent had pierced his inmost being. But the higher self blames the lower self for such folly" (Cheyne, *in loc.*). His recognition that his doubts had their source, not in defect in God's providence, but in his own ignorance and hasty irritation, which took offence without cause, prepares him for the sweet, clear note of purely spiritual aspiration and fruition which follows in the next strophe.

He had all but lost his hold of God; but though his feet had almost gone astray, his hand had been grasped by God, and that strong hold had kept him from utterly falling. The pledge of continual communion with God is not our own vacillating, wayward hearts, but God's gentle, strong clasp, which will not let us go. Thus conscious of constant fellowship, and feeling thrillingly God's touch in his inmost spirit, the psalmist rises to a height of joyous assurance, far above

doubts and perplexities caused by the unequal distribution of earth's trivial good. For him, all life will be illumined by God's counsel, which will guide him as a shepherd leads his sheep, and which he will obey as a sheep follows his shepherd. How small the delights of the prosperous men seem now! And can there be an end to that sweet alliance, such as smites earthly good? There are blessings which bear in themselves assurance of their own undyingness; and this psalmist, who had nothing to say of the future retribution falling on the sinner whose delights were confined to earth, feels that death cannot put a period to a union so blessed and spiritual as was his with God. To him, "afterwards" was irradiated with light from present blessedness; and a solemnly joyful conviction springs in his soul, which he casts into words that glance at the story of Enoch's translation, from which "take" is quoted (*cf.* Psalm xlix. 16). Whether we translate "with glory" or "to glory," there can be no question that the psalmist is looking beyond life on earth to dwelling with God in glory. We have, in this utterance, the expression of the conviction, inseparable from any true, deep communion with God, that such communion can never be at the mercy of Death. The real proof of a life beyond the grave is the resurrection of Jesus; and the pledge of it is present enjoyment of fellowship with God.

Such thoughts lift the psalmist to a height from which earth's troubles show small, and as they diminish, the perplexity arising from their distribution diminishes in proportion. They fade away altogether, when he feels how rich he is in possessing God. Surely the very summit of devotional rapture is reached in the immortal words which follow! Heaven without

God were a waste to this man. With God, he needs not nor desires anything on earth. If the impossible should be actual, and heart as well as flesh should fail, his naked self would be clothed and rich, steadfast and secure, as long as he had God; and he is so closely knit to God, that he knows that he will not lose Him though he dies, but have Him for his very own for ever. What care need he have how earth's vain goods come and go? Whatever outward calamities or poverty may be his lot, there is no riddle in that Divine government which thus enriches the devout heart; and the richest ungodly man is poor, because he shuts himself out from the one all-sufficient and enduring wealth.

A final pair of verses, answering to the introductory pair, gathers up the double truth, which the psalmist has learned to grasp more firmly by occasion of his doubts. To be absent from God is to perish. Distance from Him is separation from life. Drawing near to Him is the only good; and the psalmist has deliberately chosen it as *his* good, let worldly prosperity come or go as it list, or, rather, as God shall choose. By the effort of his own volition he has made God his refuge, and, safe in Him, he can bear the sorrows of the godly, and look unenvying on the fleeting prosperity of sinners, while, with insight drawn from communion, he can recount with faith and praise all God's works, and find in none of them a stumbling-block, nor fail to find in any of them material for a song of thankfulness.

PSALM LXXIV.

1 Why, O God, hast Thou cast us off for ever?
[Why] smokes Thine anger against the flock of Thy pasture?
2 Remember Thy congregation [which] Thou didst acquire of old,
Didst redeem [to be] the tribe of Thine inheritance,
Mount Zion, on which Thou hast dwelt.
3 Lift up Thy steps to the everlasting ruins,
The enemy has marred everything in the sanctuary.

4 Thine adversaries roared in the midst of the place where Thou dost meet [us],
They set up their signs as signs.
5 They seem like one who heaves on high
Axes against a thicket of trees.
6 And now—its carved work altogether
With hatchet and hammers they break down.
7 They have set on fire Thy sanctuary,
[Rasing it] to the ground, they have profaned the dwelling-place of Thy name.
8 They have said in their heart, Let us crush them altogether.
They have burned all meeting-places of God in the land.
9 Our signs we see not,
There is no prophet any more,
And there is no one who knows how long.

10 How long, O God, shall the adversary reproach?
Shall the enemy despise Thy name for ever?
11 Why dost Thou draw back Thy hand, even Thy right hand?
From the midst of Thy bosom [pluck it and] consume [them].

12 Yet God is my king from of old,
Working salvations in the midst of the earth.
13 Thou, Thou didst divide the sea by Thy strength,
Didst break the heads of monsters on the waters.

14 Thou, Thou didst crush the heads of Leviathan,
That Thou mightest give him [to be] meat for a people—the desert beasts.
15 Thou, Thou didst cleave [a way for] fountain and torrent;
Thou, Thou didst dry up perennial streams.
16 Thine is day, Thine also is night;
Thou, Thou didst establish light and sun.
17 Thou, Thou didst set all the bounds of the earth;
Summer and winter, Thou, Thou didst form them.

18 Remember this—the enemy reviles Jehovah,
And a foolish people despises Thy name.
19 Give not up to the company of greed Thy turtle dove,
The company of Thine afflicted forget not for ever.
20 Look upon the covenant,
For the dark places of the land are full of habitations of violence.
21 Let not the oppressed turn back ashamed,
Let the afflicted and needy praise Thy name.
22 Rise, O God, plead Thine own cause,
Remember Thy reproach from the foolish all the day.
23 Forget not the voice of Thine adversaries,
The tumult of them which rise against Thee goes up continually.

TWO periods only correspond to the circumstances described in this psalm and its companion (lxxix.) —namely, the Chaldean invasion and sack of Jerusalem, and the persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes. The general situation outlined in the psalm fits either of these; but, of its details, some are more applicable to the former and others to the later period. The later date is strongly supported by such complaints as those of the cessation of prophecy (ver. 9), the flaunting of the invaders' signs in the sanctuary (ver. 4), and the destruction by fire of all the "meeting-places of God in the land" (ver. 8). On the other hand, the earlier date better fits other features of the psalm—since Antiochus did not destroy or burn, but simply profaned the Temple, though he did, indeed, set fire to the gates and porch, but to these only. It would appear that, on either hypothesis, something must be allowed for poetical

colouring. Calvin, whom Cheyne follows in this, accounts for the introduction of the burning of the Temple into a psalm referring to the desolation wrought by Antiochus, by the supposition that the psalmist speaks in the name of the "faithful, who, looking on the horrid devastation of the Temple, and being warned by so sad a sight, carried back their thoughts to that conflagration by which it had been destroyed by the Chaldeans, and wove the two calamities together into one." It is less difficult to pare down the statement as to the burning of the Temple so as to suit the later date, than that as to the silence of prophecy and the other characteristics mentioned, so as to fit the earlier. The question is still further complicated by the similarities between the two psalms and Jeremiah (compare ver. 4 with Lam. ii. 7, and ver. 9 with Lam. ii. 9). The prophet's well-known fondness for quotations gives probability, other things being equal, to the supposition that he is quoting the psalm, which would, in that case, be older than Lamentations. But this inference scarcely holds good, if there are other grounds on which the later date of the psalm is established. It would be very natural in a singer of the Maccabean period to go back to the prophet whose sad strains had risen at another black hour. On the whole, the balance is in favour of the later date.

The psalm begins with a complaining cry to God (vv. 1–3), which passes into a piteous detail of the nation's misery (vv. 4–9), whence it rises into petition (vv. 10, 11), stays trembling faith by gazing upon His past deeds of help and the wonders of His creative power (vv. 12–17), and closes with beseeching God to vindicate the honour of His own name by the deliverance of His people (vv. 18–23).

The main emphasis of the prayer in vv. 1–3 lies on the pleas which it presents, drawn from Israel's relation to God. The characteristic Asaphic name "Thy flock" stands in ver. 1, and appeals to the Shepherd, both on the ground of His tenderness and of His honour as involved in the security of the sheep. A similar appeal lies in the two words "acquire" and "redeem," in both of which the deliverance from Egypt is referred to,—the former expression suggesting the price at which the acquisition was made, as well as the obligations of ownership; and the latter, the office of the Goel, the Kinsman-Redeemer, on whom devolved the duty of obtaining satisfaction for blood. The double designations of Israel as "Thy congregation" and as "the tribe of Thine inheritance" probably point to the religious and civil aspects of the national life. The strongest plea is put last—namely, God's dwelling on Zion. For all these reasons, the psalmist asks and expects Him to come with swift footsteps to the desolations, which have endured so long that the impatience of despair blends with the cry for help, and calls them "everlasting," even while it prays that they may be built up again. The fact that the enemy of God and of His flock has marred everything *in the sanctuary* is enough, the psalmist thinks, to move God to action.

The same thought, that the nation's calamities are really dishonouring to God, and therefore worthy of His intervention, colours the whole of the description of these in vv. 4–9. The invaders are "*Thine* adversaries." It is "in the place where *Thou* didst meet us" that their bestial noises, like those of lions over their prey, echo. It is "*Thy* sanctuary" which they have set on fire, "the dwelling-place of *Thy* name" which they have profaned. It is "*Thy* meeting-places" which

they have burned throughout the land. Only at the end of the sad catalogue is the misery of the people touched on, and that, not so much as inflicted by human foes, as by the withdrawal of God's Spirit. This is, in fact, the dominant thought of the whole psalm. It says very little about the sufferings resulting from the success of the enemy, but constantly recurs to the insult to God, and the reproach adhering to His name therefrom. The essence of it all is in the concluding prayer, "Plead *Thine own* cause" (ver. 22).

The vivid description of devastation in these verses presents some difficulties in detail, which call for brief treatment. The "signs" in ver. 4 *b* may be taken as military, such as banners or the like; but it is more in accordance with the usage of the word to suppose them to be religious emblems, or possibly idols, such as Antiochus thrust upon the Jews. In vv. 5 and 6 a change of tense represents the action described in them, as if in progress at the moment before the singer's eyes. "They seem" is literally "He is known" (or *makes himself known*), which may refer to the invaders, the change from plural to singular being frequent in Hebrew; or it may be taken impersonally, = "It seems." In either case it introduces a comparison between the hacking and hewing by the spoilers in the Temple, and the work of a woodman swinging on high his axe in the forest. "And now" seems to indicate the next step in the scene, which the psalmist picturesquely conceives as passing before his horror-stricken sight. The end of that ill-omened activity is that at last it succeeds in shattering the carved work, which, in the absence of statues, was the chief artistic glory of the Temple. All is hewed down, as if it were no more than so much growing timber. With ver. 7 the tenses

change to the calmer tone of historical narration. The plundered Temple is set on fire—a point which, as has been noticed above, is completely applicable only to the Chaldean invasion. Similarly, the next clause, "they have profaned the dwelling-place of Thy name to the ground," does not apply in literality to the action of Antiochus, who did indeed desecrate, but did not destroy, the Temple. The expression is a pregnant one, and calls for some such supplement as is given above, which, however, dilutes its vigour while it elucidates its meaning. In ver. 8 the word "let us crush them" has been erroneously taken as a noun, and rendered "their brood," a verb like "we will root out" being supplied. So the LXX. and some of the old versions, followed by Hitzig and Baethgen. But, as Delitzsch well asks,—Why are only the children to be rooted out? and why should the object of the action be expressed, and not rather the action, of which the object would be self-evident? The "meeting-places of God in the land" cannot be old sanctuaries, nor the high places, which were Israel's sin; for no psalmist could have adduced the destruction of these as a reason for God's intervention. They can only be the synagogues. The expression is a strong argument for the later date of the psalm. Equally strong is the lament in ver. 9 over the removal of the "signs"—*i.e.*, as in ver. 4, the emblems of religion, or the sacrifices and festivals, suppressed by Antiochus, which were the tokens of the covenant between God and Israel. The silence of prophecy cannot be alleged of the Chaldean period without some straining of facts and of the words here; nor is it true that then there was universal ignorance of the duration of the calamity, for Jeremiah had foretold it.

Vv. 10 and 11 are the kernel of the psalm, the

rest of which is folded round them symmetrically. Starting from this centre and working outwards, we note that it is preceded by six verses dilating on the profanations of the name of God, and followed by six setting forth the glories of that name in the past. The connection of these two portions of the psalm is obvious. They are, as it were, the inner shell round the kernel. The outer shell is the prayer in three verses which begins the psalm, and that in six verses which closes it. Ver. 10 takes up the despairing "How long" from the end of the preceding portion, and turns it into a question to God. It is best to ask Him, when ignorance pains us. But the interrogation does not so much beg for enlightenment as to the duration of the calamity as for its abbreviation. It breathes not precisely impatience, but longing that a state of things so dishonouring to God should end. That aspect, and not personal suffering, is prominent in the verse. It is "Thy name" which is insulted by the adversaries' actions, and laid open to their contempt, as the name of a Deity powerless to protect His worshippers. Their action "reproaches," and His inaction lets them "despise," His name. The psalmist cannot endure that this condition should drag on indefinitely, as if "for ever," and his prayer-question "How long?" is next exchanged for another similar blending of petition and inquiry, "*Why* dost Thou draw back Thy hand?" Both are immediately translated into that petition which they both really mean. "From the midst of Thy bosom consume," is a pregnant phrase, like that in ver. 7 *b*, and has to be completed as above, though, possibly, the verb stands absolutely as equivalent to "make an end"—*i.e.*, of such a state of things.

The psalmist's petition is next grounded on the

revelation of God's name in Israel's past, and in creative acts of power. These at once encourage him to expect that God will pluck His hand out from the folds of His robe, where it lies inactive, and appeal to God to be what He has been of old, and to rescue the name which He has thus magnified from insult. There is singular solemnity in the emphatic reiteration of "Thou" in these verses. The Hebrew does not usually express the pronominal nominative to a verb, unless special attention is to be called to it; but in these verses it does so uniformly, with one exception, and the sevenfold repetition of the word brings forcibly into view the Divine personality and former deeds which pledge God to act now. Remembrance of past wonders made present misery more bitter, but it also fanned into a flame the spark of confidence that the future would be like the past. One characteristic of the Asaph psalms is wistful retrospect, which is sometimes the basis of rebuke, and sometimes of hope, and sometimes of deepened sorrow, but is here in part appeal to God and in part consolation. The familiar instances of His working drawn from the Exodus history appear in the psalm. First comes the dividing of the Red Sea, which is regarded chiefly as occasioning the destruction of the Egyptians, who are symbolised by the "sea-monsters" and by "leviathan" (the crocodile). Their fate is an omen of what the psalmist hopes may befall the oppressors of his own day. There is great poetic force in the representation that the strong hand, which by a stroke parted the waters, crushed by the same blow the heads of the foul creatures who "floated many a rood" on them. And what an end for the pomp of Pharaoh and his host, to provide a meal for jackals and the other beasts of the desert, who tear the

corpses strewing the barren shore! The meaning is completely misapprehended when "the people inhabiting the wilderness" is taken to be wild desert tribes. The expression refers to animals, and its use as designating them has parallels (as Prov. xxx. 25, 26).

In ver. 15 another pregnant expression occurs, which is best filled out as above, the reference being to cleaving the rock for the flow of water, with which is contrasted in *b* the drying up of the Jordan. Thus the whole of the Exodus period is covered. It is noteworthy that the psalmist adduces only wonders wrought on waters, being possibly guided in his selection by the familiar poetic use of floods and seas as emblems of hostile power and unbridled insolence. From the wonders of history he passes to those of creation, and chiefly of that might by which times alternate and each constituent of the Kosmos has its appointed limits. Day and night, summer and winter, recur by God's continual operation. Is there to be no dawning for Israel's night of weeping, and no summer making glad the winter of its discontent? "Thou didst set all the bounds of the earth,"—wilt Thou not bid back this surging ocean which has transgressed its limits and filled the breadth of Thy land? All the lights in the sky, and chiefly the greatest of them, Thou didst establish,—surely Thou wilt end this eclipse in which Thy people grope.

Thus the psalmist lifts himself to the height of confident though humble prayer, with which the psalm closes, recurring to the opening tones. Its centre is, as we have seen, a double remonstrance—"How long?" and "Why?" The encircling circumference is earnest supplication, of which the keynote is "Remember" (vv 2 and 18).

The gist of this closing prayer is the same appeal to God to defend His own honour, which we have found in the former verses. It is put in various forms here. Twice (vv. 18 and 22) God is besought to remember the reproach and contumely heaped on His name, and apparently warranted by His inaction. The claim of Israel for deliverance is based in ver. 19 upon its being "*Thy* turtle dove," which therefore cannot be abandoned without sullying Thy fame. The psalmist spreads the "covenant" before God, as reminding Him of His obligations under it. He asks that such deeds may be done as will give occasion to the afflicted and needy to "praise Thy name," which is being besmirched by their calamities. Finally, in wonderfully bold words, he calls on God to take up what is, after all, "His own" quarrel, and, if the cry of the afflicted does not move Him, to listen to the loud voices of those who blaspheme Him all the day. Reverent earnestness of supplication sometimes sounds like irreverence; but, "when the heart's deeps boil in earnest," God understands the meaning of what sounds strange, and recognises the profound trust in His faithfulness and love which underlies bold words.

The precise rendering of ver. 19 is very doubtful. The word rendered above by "company" may mean *life* or *a living creature*, or, collectively, a *company* of such. It has been taken in all these meanings here, and sometimes in one of them in the first clause, and in another in the second, as most recently by Baethgen, who renders "Abandon not to *the beast*" in *a*, and "*The life of* thine afflicted" in *b*. But it must have the same meaning in both clauses, and the form of the word shows that it must be construed in both with a following "of." If so, the rendering adopted above

is best, though it involves taking the word rendered "greed" (lit., soul) in a somewhat doubtful sense. This rendering is adopted in the R.V. (margin), and is, on the whole, the least difficult, and yields a probable sense. Delitzsch recognises the necessity for giving the ambiguous word the same meaning in both clauses, and takes that meaning to be "creature," which suits well enough in *a*, but gives a very harsh meaning to *b*. "Forget not Thy poor animals for ever" is surely an impossible rendering. Other attempts have been made to turn the difficulty by textual alteration. Hupfeld would transpose two words in *a*, and so gets "Give not up to rage the life of Thy dove." Cheyne corrects the difficult word into "to the sword," and Graetz follows Dyserinck in preferring "to death," or Krochmal, who reads "to destruction." If the existing text is retained, probably the rendering adopted above is best.

PSALM LXXV.

1 We give thanks to Thee, O God, we give thanks;
And [that] Thy name is near, Thy wondrous works declare

2 "When I seize the set time,
I, I judge [in] equity.
3 Dissolved [in fear] are earth and its inhabitants:
I, I set firm its pillars. Selah.
4 I say to the fools, Be not foolish:
And to the wicked, Lift not up the horn:
5 Lift not up your horn on high;
Speak not with stiff neck."

6 For not from east, nor from west,
And not from the wilderness is lifting up.
7 For God is judge:
This one He abases, and that one He lifts up.
8 For a cup is in the hands of Jehovah,
And it foams with wine; it is full of mixture,
And He pours out from it:
Yea, its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth gulp down and drink.

9 And as for me, I will declare [it] for ever,
I will harp to the God of Jacob.
10 And all the horns of the wicked will I cut off:
Exalted shall be the horns of the righteous.

THIS psalm deals with the general thought of God's judgment in history, especially on heathen nations. It has no clear marks of connection with any particular instance of that judgment. The prevalent opinion has been that it refers, like the next psalm, to the destruction of Sennacherib's army. There are in it slight resemblances to Psalm xlvi., and to Isaiah's

prophecies regarding that event, which support the conjecture. Cheyne seems to waver, as on page 148 of "Orig. of Psalt." he speaks of "the two Maccabean psalms, lxxiv. and lxxv.," and on page 166 concludes that they "may be Maccabean, . . . but we cannot claim for this view the highest degree of probability, especially as neither psalm refers to any warlike deeds of Israelites. It is safer, I think, to . . . assign them at the earliest to one of the happier parts of the Persian age." It is apparently still safer to refrain from assigning them to any precise period.

The kernel of the psalm is a majestic Divine utterance, proclaiming God's judgment as at hand. The limits of that Divine word are doubtful, but it is best taken as occupying two pairs of verses (2–5). It is preceded by one verse of praise, and followed by three (6–8) of warning spoken by the psalmist, and by two (9, 10) in which he again praises God the Judge, and stands forth as an instrument of His judicial acts.

In ver. 1, which is as a prelude to the great Voice from heaven, we hear the nation giving thanks beforehand for the judgment which is about to fall. The second part of the verse is doubtful. It may be taken thus: "And Thy name is near; they (*i.e.*, men) declare Thy wondrous works." So Delitzsch, who comments: The Church "welcomes the future acts of God with fervent thanks, and all they that belong to it declare beforehand God's wondrous works." Several modern scholars, among whom are Grätz, Baethgen, and Cheyne, adopt a textual alteration which gives the reading, "They who call upon Thy name declare," etc. But the rendering of the A.V., which is also that of Hupfeld and Perowne, gives a good meaning. All God's deeds in history proclaim that He is ever at hand to help. His name

is His character as revealed by His self-manifestation; and this is the glad thanks-evoking lesson, taught by all the past and by the judicial act of which the psalm is the precursor—that He is near to deliver His people. As Deut. iv. 7 has it, "What nation is there that hath God so near unto them?"

The Divine voice breaks in with majestic abruptness, as in Psalm xlvi. 10. It proclaims impending judgment, which will restore society, dissolving in dread or moral corruption, and will abase insolent wickedness, which is therefore exhorted to submission. In ver. 2 two great principles are declared—one in regard to the time and the other in regard to the animating spirit of God's judgment. Literally, the first words of the verse run, "When I lay hold of the appointed time." The thought is that He has His own appointed time at which His power will flash forth into act, and that till that moment arrives evil is permitted to run its course, and insolent men to play their "fantastic tricks" before an apparently indifferent or unobserving God. His servants are tempted to think that He delays too long; His enemies, that He will never break His silence. But the slow hand traverses the dial in time, and at last the hour strikes and the crash comes punctually at the moment. The purposes of delay are presented in Scripture as twofold: on the one hand, "that the long-suffering of God may lead to repentance"; and on the other, that evil may work itself out and show its true character. To learn the lesson that, "when the set time is come," judgment will fall, would save the oppressed from impatience and despondency and the oppressor from dreams of impunity. It is a law fruitful for the interpretation of the world's history. The other fundamental truth in this verse is

that the principle of God's judgment is equity, rigid adherence to justice, so that every act of man's shall receive accurately "its just recompense of reward." The "I" of ver. 2 *b* is emphatic. It brings to view the lofty personality of the Judge, and asserts the operation of a Divine hand in human affairs, while it also lays the basis for the assurance that, the judgment being His, and He being what He is, it must be "according to truth."

Such a "set time" has arrived, as ver. 3 proceeds to declare. Oppression and corruption have gone so far that "the earth and its inhabitants" are as if "dissolved." All things are rushing to ruin. The psalmist does not distinguish between the physical and the moral here. His figure is employed in reference to both orders, which he regards as indissolubly connected. Possibly he is echoing Psalm xlvi. 6, "The earth melted," though there the "melting" is an expression for dread occasioned by God's voice, and here rather refers to the results of "the proud man's wrong." At such a supreme moment, when the solid framework of society and of the world itself seems to be on the point of dissolution, the mighty Divine Personality intervenes; that strong hand is thrust forth to grasp the tottering pillars and stay their fall; or, in plain words, God Himself then intervenes to re-establish the moral order of society, and thus to save the sufferers. (Comp. Hannah's song in 1 Sam. ii. 8.) That intervention has necessarily two aspects, being on the one hand restorative, and on the other punitive. Therefore in vv. 4 and 5 follow Divine warnings to the "fools" and "wicked," whose insolent boasting and tyranny have provoked it. The word rendered "fools" seems to include the idea of boastfulness as well as folly in the Biblical sense of that word,

which points to moral rather than to merely intellectual aberration. "Lifting up the horn" is a symbol of arrogance. According to the accents, the word rendered "stiff" is not to be taken as attached to "neck," but as the object of the verb "speak," the resulting translation being, "Speak not arrogance with a [stretched out] neck"; and thus Delitzsch would render. But it is more natural to take the word in its usual construction as an epithet of "neck," expressive of superciliously holding a high head. Cheyne follows Baethgen in altering the text so as to read "rock" for "neck"—a slight change which is supported by the LXX. rendering ("Speak not unrighteousness against God")—and renders "nor speak arrogantly of the rock." Like the other advocates of a Maccabean date, he finds here a reference to the mad blasphemies of Antiochus Epiphanes; but the words would suit Rabshakeh's railings quite as well.

The exact point where the Divine oracle passes into the psalmist's own words is doubtful. Ver. 7 is evidently his; and that verse is so closely connected with ver. 6 that it is best to make the break at the end of ver. 5, and to suppose that what follows is the singer's application of the truths which he has heard. Two renderings of ver. 6 *b* are possible, which, though very different in English, turn on the minute difference in the Hebrew of one vowel sign. The same letters spell the Hebrew word meaning *mountains* and that meaning *lifting up*. With one punctuation of the preceding word "wilderness," we must translate "from the wilderness of mountains"; with another, the two words are less closely connected, and we must render, "from the wilderness is lifting up." If the former rendering is adopted, the verse is incomplete, and some phrase

like "help comes" must be supplied, as Delitzsch suggests. But "lifting up" occurs so often in this psalm, that it is more natural to take the word in that meaning here, especially as the next verse ends with it, in a different tense, and thus makes a sort of rhyme with this verse. "The wilderness of mountains," too, is a singular designation, either for the Sinaitic peninsula or for Egypt, or for the wilderness of Judah, which have all been suggested as intended here. "The wilderness" stands for the south, and thus three cardinal points are named. Why is the north omitted? If "lifting up" means deliverance, the omission may be due to the fact that Assyria (from which the danger came, if we adopt the usual view of the occasion of the psalm) lay to the north. But the meaning in the rest of the psalm is not *deliverance*, and the psalmist is addressing the "foolish boasters" here; and that consideration takes away the force of such an explanation of the omission. Probably no significance attaches to it. The general idea is simply that "lifting up" does not come from any quarter of earth, but, as the next verse goes on to say, solely from God. How absurd, then, is the self-sufficient loftiness of godless men! How vain to look along the low levels of earth, when all true elevation and dignity come from God! The very purpose of His judicial energy is to abase the lofty and raise the low. His hand lifts up, and there is no secure or lasting elevation but that which He effects. His hand casts down, and that which attracts His lightnings is "the haughtiness of man." The outburst of His judgment works like a volcanic eruption, which flings up elevations in valleys and shatters lofty peaks. The features of the country are changed after it, and the world looks new. The metaphor of ver. 8,

in which judgment is represented as a cup of foaming wine, which God puts to the lips of the nations, receives great expansion in the prophets, especially in Jeremiah, and recurs in the Apocalypse. There is a grim contrast between the images of festivity and hospitality called up by the picture of a host presenting the wine cup to his guests, and the stern compulsion which makes the "wicked" gulp down the nauseous draught held by God to their reluctant lips. The utmost extremity of punitive inflictions, unflinchingly inflicted, is suggested by the terrible imagery. And the judgment is to be world-wide; for "all the wicked of the earth" are to drink, and that to the dregs.

And how does the prospect affect the psalmist? It moves him, first, to solemn praise—not only because God has proved Himself by these terrible things in righteousness to be the God of His people, but also because He has thereby manifested His own character as righteous and hating evil. It is no selfish nor cruel joy which stirs in devout hearts, when God comes forth in history and smites oppressing insolence. It is but a spurious benevolence which affects to recoil from the conception of a God who judges and, when needful, smites. This psalmist not only praised, but in his degree vowed to imitate.

The last verse is best understood as his declaration of his own purpose, though some commentators have proposed to transfer it to the earlier part of the psalm, regarding it as part of the Divine oracle. But it is in its right place where it stands. God's servants are His instruments in carrying out His judgments; and there is a very real sense in which all of them should seek to fight against dominant evil and to cripple the power of tyrannous godlessness.

PSALM LXXVI.

1 Known in Judah is God,
In Israel is His name great.
2 And in Salem was His tent [pitched],
And His dwelling in Zion.
3 There He shivered the lightnings of the bow,
Shield and sword and battle. Selah.

4 Effulgent art Thou [and] glorious
From the mountains of prey [everlasting mountains?].
5 Spoiled are the stout of heart, they slumber [into] their sleep,
And none of the men of might have found their hands.
6 At Thy rebuke, O God of Jacob,
Both chariot and horse are sunk in deep sleep.

7 Thou! dread art Thou,
And who can stand before Thee, in the time of Thine anger?
8 From heaven didst Thou make judgment heard,
Earth feared and was stilled,
9 At the rising of God for judgment
To save all the afflicted of the earth. Selah.

10 For the wrath of man shall praise Thee,
[With] the residue of wraths Thou girdest Thyself.
11 Vow and pay to Jehovah your God,
Let all around Him bring presents to the Terrible One.
12 He cuts down the [lofty] spirit of princes,
A dread to the kings of the earth.

IN contents and tone this psalm is connected with Psalms xlvi. and xlviii. No known event corresponds so closely with its allusions as the destruction of Sennacherib's army, to which the LXX. in its superscription refers it. The singer is absorbed in the one

tremendous judgment which had delivered the dwelling-place of Jehovah. His song has but one theme—God's forth-flashing of judgment on Zion's foes. One note of thankfulness sounds at the close, but till then all is awe. The psalm is divided into four strophes, of three verses each. The former two describe the act; the latter two deal with its results, in an awed world and thankful praise.

The emphatic words in the first strophe are those which designate the scene of the Divine act. The glow of humble pride, of wonder and thankfulness, is perceptible in the fourfold reiteration—"in Judah, in Israel, in Salem, in Zion"; all which names are gathered up in the eloquent "There" of ver. 3. The true point of view from which to regard God's acts is that they are His Self-revelation. The reason why Israel is the object of the acts which manifest His name is that there He has chosen to dwell. And, since He dwells there, the special act of judgment which the psalm celebrates was there performed. "The lightnings of the bow" picturesquely designate arrows, from their swift flight and deadly impact. (Compare Psalm xlvi. 9.)

The second strophe (vv. 4–6) comes closer to the fact celebrated, and describes, with magnificent sweep, brevity, and vividness, the death sleep of the enemy. But, before it shows the silent corpses, it lifts one exclamation of reverence to the God who has thus manifested His power. The word rendered "Effulgent" is doubtful, and by a slight transposition of letters becomes, as in ver. 7 which begins the next strophe, "dread." In ver. 4*b* the rendering "more excellent than," etc., yields a comparison which can scarcely be called worthy. It is little to say of God that He is more glorious than the enemies' "mountains of prey,"

though Delitzsch tries to recommend this rendering, by supposing that God is represented as towering above "the Lebanon of the hostile army of peoples." The Hebrew idiom expresses comparison by the preposition *from* appended to the adjective in its simple form, and it is best here to take the construction as indicating point of departure rather than comparison. God comes forth as "glorious," from the lofty heights where He sits supreme. But "mountains of prey" is a singular phrase, which can only be explained by the supposition that God is conceived of as a Conqueror, who has laid up His spoils in His inaccessible store-house on high. But the LXX. translates "*everlasting* mountains," which fits the context well, and implies a text, which might easily be misinterpreted as meaning "prey," which misinterpretation may afterwards have crept into the body of the text. If this alteration is not adopted, the meaning will be as just stated.

Ver. 5 gives some support to the existing text, by its representation of the stout-hearted foe as "spoiled." They are robbed of their might, their weapons, and their life. How graphically the psalmist sets before the eyes of his readers the process of destruction from its beginning! He shows us the warriors falling asleep in the drowsiness of death. How feeble their "might" now! One vain struggle, as in the throes of death, and the hands which shot the "lightnings of the bow" against Zion are stiff for evermore. One word from the sovereign lips of the God of Jacob, and all the noise of the camp is hushed, and we look out upon a field of the dead, lying in awful stillness, dreamlessly sleeping their long slumber.

The third strophe passes from description of the destruction of the enemy to paint its widespread results

in the manifestation to a hushed world of God's judgment. In it anger and love are wondrously blended; and while no creature can bear the terrible blaze of His face, nor endure the weight of His onset "in the time of His anger," the most awful manifestations thereof have a side of tenderness and an inner purpose of blessing. The core of judgment is mercy. It is worthy of God to smite the oppressor and to save the "afflicted," who not only suffer, but trust. When He makes His judgments reverberate from on high, earth should keep an awed stillness, as nature does when thunder peals. When some gigantic and hoary iniquity crashes to its fall, there is a moment of awed silence after the hideous tumult.

The last strophe is mainly a summons to praise God for His manifestation of delivering judgment. Ver. 10 is obscure. The first clause is intelligible enough. Since God magnifies His name by His treatment of opposing men, who set themselves against Him, their very foaming fury subserves His praise. That is a familiar thought with all the Scripture writers who meditate on God's dealings. But the second clause is hard. Whose "wraths" are spoken of in it? God's or man's? The change from the singular ("wrath of man") to plural ("wraths") in *b* makes it all but certain that God's fulness of "wrath" is meant here. It is set over against the finite and puny "wrath" of men, as an ocean might be contrasted with a shallow pond. If so, God's girding Himself with the residue of His own wrath will mean that, after every such forth-putting of it as the psalm has been hymning, there still remains an unexhausted store ready to flame out if need arise. It is a stern and terrible thought of God, but it is solemnly true. His loving-kindness out-measures

man's, and so does His judicial judgment. All Divine attributes partake of Infinitude, and the stores of His punitive anger are not less deep than those of His gentle goodness.

Therefore men are summoned to vow and pay their vows; and while Israel is called to worship, the nation around, who have seen that field of the dead, are called to do homage and bring tribute to Him who, as it so solemnly shows, can cut off the breath of the highest or can cut down their pride, as a grape-gatherer does the ripe cluster (for such is the allusion in the word "cuts down"). The last clause of the psalm, which stands somewhat disconnected from the preceding, gathers up the lessons of the tremendous event which inspired it, when it sets Him forth as to be feared by the kings of the earth.

PSALM LXXVII.

1 [I would lift] my voice to God and cry;
[I would lift] my voice to God, that He may give ear to me.
2 In the day of my straits I sought the Lord:
My hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing;
My soul refused to be comforted.
3 [When] I remember God, I must sigh;
[When] I muse, my spirit is covered [with gloom]. Selah.

4 Thou hast held open the guards of my eyes:
I am buffeted, and cannot speak.
5 I considered the days of old,
The years of ancient times.
6 I would remember my song in the night:
In my heart I would muse,—and my spirit made anxious search.

7 Will the Lord cast off for ever?
And will He continue no more to be favourable?
8 Is His loving-kindness ended for ever?
Has His promise failed for all generations?
9 Has God forgotten to be gracious?
Or has He in anger drawn in His compassions? Selah.

10 Then I said, It is my sickness;
[But I will remember] the years of the right hand of the Most High.
11 I will celebrate the deeds of Jah;
For I will remember Thy wonders of old.
12 And I will meditate on all Thy work,
And will muse on Thy doings.

13 O God, in holiness is Thy way:
Who is a great God like God?
14 Thou, Thou art the God who doest wonders:
Thou hast made known among the peoples Thy strength.

15 Thou hast redeemed with Thine arm Thy people,
The sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah.

16 The waters saw Thee, O God;
The waters saw Thee, they writhed in pangs:
Yea, the abysses trembled.
17 The clouds were poured out [in] water;
The skies gave [forth] a voice:
Yea, Thine arrows went to and fro.
18 The voice of Thy thunder was in [Thy] chariot wheel;
Lightnings illumined the world:
The earth trembled and shook.
19 In the sea was Thy way,
And Thy paths in great waters,
And Thy footprints were not known.
20 Thou leadest Thy people like sheep,
By the hand of Moses and Aaron.

THE occasion of the profound sadness of the first part of this psalm may be inferred from the thoughts which brighten it into hope in the second. These were the memories of past national deliverance. It is natural to suppose that present national disasters were the causes of the sorrow which enveloped the psalmist's spirit and suggested questions of despair, only saved from being blasphemous because they were so wistful. But it by no means follows that the singer is simply the personified nation. The piercing tone of individual grief is too clear, especially in the introductory verses, to allow of that hypothesis. Rather, the psalmist has taken into his heart the troubles of his people. Public calamity has become personal pain. What dark epoch has left its marks in this psalm remains uncertain. If Delitzsch's contention that Habakkuk iii. is in part drawn from it were indubitably established, the attribution of the psalm to the times of Josiah would be plausible; but there is, at least, room for doubt whether there has been borrowing, and if so,

which is original and which echo. The calamities of the Exile in their severity and duration would give reasonable ground for the psalmist's doubts whether God had not cast off His people for ever. No brief or partial eclipse of His favour would supply adequate occasion for these.

The psalm falls into two parts, in the former of which (vv. 1–9) deepest gloom wraps the singer's spirit, while in the latter (vv. 10–20) the clouds break. Each of these parts falls into three strophes, usually of three verses; but in the concluding strophe, consisting of five, Selah stands at the end of the first and third, and is not present at the end of the second, because it is more closely connected with the third than with the first. In like manner the first strophe of the second part (vv. 10–12) has no Selah, but the second has (vv. 13–15); the closing strophe (vv. 16–20) being thus parted off.

The psalmist's agitation colours his language, which fluctuates in the first six verses between expressions of resolve or desire (vv. 1, 3, 6) and simple statement of fact (vv. 2, 4, 5). He has prayed long and earnestly, and nothing has been laid in answer on his outstretched palm. Therefore his cry has died down into a sigh. He fain would lift his voice to God, but dark thoughts make him dumb for supplication, and eloquent only in self-pitying monologue. A man must have waded through like depths to understand this pathetic bewilderment of spirit. They who glide smoothly over a sunlit surface of sea little know the terrors of sinking, with choked lungs, into the abyss. A little experience will go further than much learning in penetrating the meaning of these moanings of lamed faith. They begin with an elliptical phrase, which, in its fragmentary character, reveals the psalmist's discomposure. "My

voice to God" evidently needs some such completion as is supplied above; and the form of the following verb ("cry") suggests that the supplied one should express wish or effort. The repetition of the phrase in 1 *b* strengthens the impression of agitation. The last words of that clause may be a petition, "give ear," but are probably better taken as above. The psalmist would fain cry to God, that he may be heard. He has cried, as he goes on to tell in calmer mood in ver. 2, and has apparently not been heard. He describes his unintermitted supplications by a strong metaphor. The word rendered "stretched out" is literally *poured out* as water, and is applied to weeping eyes (Lam. iii. 49). The Targum substitutes eye for hand here, but that is commentary, not translation. The clause which we render "without ceasing" is literally "and grew not stiff." That word, too, is used of tears, and derivatives from it are found in the passage just referred to in Lamentations ("intermission"), and in Lam. ii. 18 ("rest"). It carries on the metaphor of a stream, the flow of which is unchecked. The application of this metaphor to the hand is harsh, but the meaning is plain—that all night long the psalmist extended his hand in the attitude of prayer, as if open to receive God's gift. His voice "rose like a fountain night and day"; but brought no comfort to his soul; and he bewails himself, in the words which tell of Jacob's despair when he heard that Joseph was dead. *So* rooted and inconsolable does he think his sorrows. The thought of God has changed its nature, as if the sun were to become a source of darkness. When he looks up, he can only sigh; when he looks within, his spirit is clothed or veiled—*i.e.*, wrapped in melancholy.

In the next strophe of three verses (vv 4–6) the

psalmist plunges yet deeper into gloom, and unfolds more clearly its occasion. Sorrow, like a beast of prey, devours at night; and every sad heart knows how eyelids, however wearied, refuse to close upon as wearied eyes, which gaze wide opened into the blackness and see dreadful things there. This man felt as if God's finger was pushing up his lids and forcing him to stare out into the night. Buffeted, as if laid on an anvil and battered with the shocks of doom, he cannot speak; he can only moan, as he is doing. Prayer seems to be impossible. But to say, "I cannot pray; would that I could!" is surely prayer, which will reach its destination, though the sender knows it not. The psalmist had found no ease in remembering God. He finds as little in remembering a brighter past. That he should have turned to history in seeking for consolation implies that his affliction was national in its sweep, however intensely personal in its pressure. This retrospective meditation on the great deeds of old is characteristic of the Asaph psalms. It ministers in them to many moods, as memory always does. In this psalm we have it feeding two directly opposite emotions. It may be the nurse of bitter Despair, or of bright-eyed Hope. When the thought of God occasions but sighs, the remembrance of His acts can only make the present more doleful. The heavy spirit finds reasons for heaviness in God's past and in its own. The psalmist in his sleepless vigils remembers other wakeful times, when his song filled the night with music and "awoke the dawn." Ver. 6 is parallel with ver. 3. The three key-words, *remember*, *muse*, *spirit*, recur. There, musing ended in wrapping the spirit in deeper gloom. Here, it stings that spirit to activity in questionings, which the next strophe flings out in vehement number and

startling plainness. It is better to be pricked to even such interrogations by affliction than to be made torpid by it. All depends on the temper in which they are asked. If that is right, answers which will scatter gloom are not far off.

The comparison of present national evils with former happiness naturally suggests such questions. Obviously, the casting off spoken of in ver. 7 is that of the nation, and hence its mention confirms the view that the psalmist is suffering under public calamities. All the questions mean substantially one thing—has God changed? They are not, as some questions are, the strongest mode of asserting their negative; nor are they, like others, a more than half assertion of their affirmative; but they are what they purport to be—the anxious interrogations of an afflicted man, who would fain be sure that God is the same as ever, but is staggered by the dismal contrast of Now and Then. He faces with trembling the terrible possibilities, and, however his language may seem to regard failure of resources or fickleness of purpose or limitations in long-suffering as conceivable in God, his doubts are better put into plain speech than lying diffused and darkening, like poisonous mists, in his heart. A thought, be it good or bad, can be dealt with when it is made articulate. Formulating vague conceptions is like cutting a channel in a bog for the water to run. One gets it together in manageable shape, and the soil is drained. So the end of the despondent half of the psalm is marked by the bringing to distinct speech of the suspicions which floated in the singer's mind and made him miserable. The Selah bids us dwell on the questions, so as to realise their gravity and prepare ourselves for their answer.

The second part begins in ver. 10 with an obscure and much-commented-on verse, of which two explanations are possible, depending mainly on the meanings of the two words "sickness" and "years." The former word may mean "my wounding" or "my sickness." The latter is by many commentators taken to be an infinitive verb, with the signification *to be changed*, and by others to be a plural noun meaning "*years*," as in ver. 6. Neglecting some minor differences, we may say that those who understand the word to mean *being changed* explain the whole thus: "This is my wound (misery, sorrow), that the right hand of the Most High has changed." So the old versions, and Hupfeld, Perowne, and Baethgen. But the use of the word in ver. 6 for "years" creates a strong presumption that its sense is the same here. As to the other word, its force is best seen by reference to a closely parallel passage in Jer. x. 19—"I said, Truly this is my grief (margin, *sickness*), and I must bear it"; where the word for *grief*, though not the same as in the psalm, is cognate. The most probable meaning, then, for the expression here is, "This my affliction is sent from God, and I must bear it with resignation." Then follows an elevating thought expressed in its simplest form like an exclamation, "*the years*," etc.—*i.e.*, "I will remember (comp. ver. 6) the time when the right hand of Jehovah had the pre-eminence" (Cheyne, *in loc.*). Delitzsch leaves the ellipsis unfilled, and takes the whole to mean that the psalmist says to himself that the affliction allotted will only last for the time which the mighty hand of God has determined. The rendering adopted above avoids the awkwardness of using the same word in two different senses in the same context, yields an appropriate meaning, especially in view of

the continual references to remembering, and begins the new strophe with a new note of hopefulness, whereas the other renderings prolong the minor key of the first part into the second. It is therefore to be preferred. The revolution in feeling is abrupt. All is sunny and bright in the last half. What makes the change? The recognition of two great truths: first, that the calamity is laid on Israel, and on the psalmist as a member of the nation, by God, and has not come because of that impossible change in Him which the bitter questions had suggested; and, second, the unchangeable eternity of God's delivering power. That second truth comes to him as with a flash, and the broken words of ver. 10*b* hail the sudden rising of the new star.

The remainder of the psalm holds fast by that thought of the great deeds of God in the past. It is a signal example of how the same facts remembered may depress or gladden, according to the point of view from which they are regarded. We can elect whether memory shall nourish despondency or gladness. Yet the alternative is not altogether a matter of choice; for the only people to whom "remembering happier things" need not be "a sorrow's crown of sorrow" are those who see God in the past, and so are sure that every joy that was and is not shall yet again be, in more thrilling and lasting form. If He shines out on us from the east that we have left behind, His brightness will paint the western sky towards which we travel. Beneath confidence in the perpetuity of past blessings lies confidence in the eternity of God. The "years of the right hand of the Most High" answer all questions as to His change of purpose or of disposition, and supply the only firm foundation for calm assurance of the

future. Memory supplies the colours with which Hope paints her truest pictures. "That which hath been is that which shall be" may be the utterance of the *blasé* man of the world, or of the devout man who trusts in the living God, and therefore knows that

> "There shall never be one lost good!
> What was shall live as before."

The strophe in vv. 13–15 fixes on the one great redeeming act of the Exodus as the pledge of future deeds of a like kind, as need requires. The language is deeply tinged with reminiscences of Exod. xv. "In holiness" (not "in the sanctuary"), the question "Who is so great a God?" the epithet "Who doest wonders," all come from Exod. xv. 11. "[Thine] arm" in the psalm recalls "By the greatness of Thine arm" in Exodus (ver. 16), and the psalmist's "redeemed Thy people" reproduces "the people which Thou hast redeemed" (Exod. xv. 13). The separate mention of "sons of Joseph" can scarcely be accounted for, if the psalm is prior to the division of the kingdoms. But the purpose of the designation is doubtful. It may express the psalmist's protest against the division as a breach of ancient national unity or his longings for reunion.

The final strophe differs from the others in structure. It contains five verses instead of three, and the verses are (with the exception of the last) composed of three clauses each instead of two. Some commentators have supposed that vv. 16–19 are an addition to the original psalm, and think that they do not cohere well with the preceding. This view denies that there is any allusion in the closing verses to the passage of the Red Sea, and takes the whole as simply a description of a

theophany, like that in Psalm xviii. But surely the writhing of the waters as if in pangs at the sight of God is such an allusion. Ver. 19, too, is best understood as referring to the path through the sea, whose waters returned and covered God's footprints from human eyes. Unless there is such a reference in vv. 16–19, the connection with the preceding and with ver. 20 is no doubt loose. But that is not so much a reason for denying the right of these verses to a place in the psalm as for recognising the reference. Why should a mere description of a theophany, which had nothing to do with the psalmist's theme, have been tacked on to it? No doubt, the thunders, lightnings, and storm so grandly described here are unmentioned in Exodus, and, quite possibly, may be simply poetic heightening of the scene, intended to suggest how majestic was the intervention which freed Israel. Some commentators, indeed, have claimed the picture as giving additional facts concerning the passage of the Red Sea. Dean Stanley, for example, has worked these points into his vivid description; but that carries literalism too far.

The picture in the psalm is most striking. The continuous short clauses crash and flash like the thunders and lightnings. That energetic metaphor of the waters writhing as if panic-struck is more violent than Western taste approves, but its emotional vigour as a rendering of the fact is unmistakable. "Thine arrows went to and fro" is a very imperfect transcript of the Hebrew, which suggests the swift zigzag of the fierce flashes. In ver. 18 the last word offers some difficulty. It literally means *a wheel*, and is apparently best rendered as above, the thunder being poetically conceived of as the sound of the rolling wheels of God's chariot. There are several coincidences between vv. 16–19 of the psalm

and Hab. iii. 10–15 : namely, the expression "writhed in pain," applied in Habakkuk to the mountains ; the word rendered "overflowing" (A.V.) or "tempest" (R.V.) in Hab. v. 10, cognate with the verb in ver. 17 of the psalm, and there rendered "poured out" ; the designation of lightnings as God's arrows. Delitzsch strongly maintains the priority of the psalm ; Hupfeld as strongly that of the prophet.

The last verse returns to the two-claused structure of the earlier part. It comes in lovely contrast with the majestic and terrible picture preceding, like the wonderful setting forth of the purpose of the other theophany in Psalm xviii., which was for no higher end than to draw one poor man from the mighty waters. All this pomp of Divine appearance, with lightnings, thunders, a heaving earth, a shrinking sea, had for its end the leading the people of God to their land, as a shepherd does his flock. The image is again an echo of Exod. xv. 13. The thing intended is not merely the passage of the Red Sea, but the whole process of guidance begun there amid the darkness. Such a close is too abrupt to please some commentators. But what more was needful or possible to be said, in a retrospect of God's past acts, for the solace of a dark present ? It was more than enough to scatter fears and flash radiance into the gloom which had wrapped the psalmist. He need search no further. He has found what he sought ; and so he hushes his song, and gazes in silence on the all-sufficient answer which memory has brought to all his questions and doubts. Nothing could more completely express the living, ever-present worth of the ancient deeds of God than the "abruptness" with which this psalm ceases rather than ends.

PSALM LXXVIII.

1 Give ear, my people, to my law,
Bow your ear to the sayings of my mouth.
2 I will open my mouth in a parable,
I will utter riddles from the ancient days,
3 What we have heard and known
And our fathers have told us,
4 We will not hide from their sons,
Recounting to the generation to come the praises of Jehovah,
And His might and the wonders that He has done.

5 For He established a testimony in Jacob,
And appointed a law in Israel,
Which He commanded our fathers
To make known to their children;
6 In order that the generation to come might know,
The children who should be born,
[Who] should rise up and tell to their children,
7 That they might place their confidence in God,
And not forget the deeds of God,
But keep His commandments;
8 And not be as their fathers,
A stubborn and rebellious generation,
A generation that did not make its heart steadfast,
And whose spirit was not faithful towards God.

9 The children of Ephraim, bearing [and] drawing bows,
Turned back in the day of onset.
10 They kept not the covenant of God,
And in His law they refused to walk,
11 And they forgot His doings,
And the wonders which He had showed them.
12 Before their fathers He did marvels,
In the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.

13 He cleft the sea and let them pass through,
And He reared up the waters like a heap of corn,
14 And He guided them in a cloud by day
And all night in a fiery light.
15 He cleft rocks in the wilderness,
And gave them drink abundantly, as [from] ocean depths.
16 And He brought forth streams from the cliff,
And made waters to flow down like rivers.

17 But they went on to sin yet more against Him,
To rebel against the Most High in the desert.
18 And they tempted God in their heart,
In asking meat after their desire.
19 And they spoke against God, they said,
"Is God able to spread a table in the wilderness?
20 Behold, He struck a rock, and waters gushed forth,
And torrents flowed out.
Is He able to give bread also?
Or will He prepare flesh for His people?"

21 Jehovah heard and was wroth,
And a fire was kindled in Jacob,
And wrath also went up against Israel.
22 For they did not believe in God,
And trusted not in His salvation.
23 And He commanded the clouds above,
And opened the doors of heaven,
24 And rained upon them manna to eat,
And gave them the corn of heaven.
25 Men did eat the bread of the Mighty Ones;
He sent them sustenance to the full.

26 He made the east wind go forth in the heavens,
And guided the south wind by His power;
27 And He rained flesh upon them like dust,
And winged fowls like the sand of the seas,
28 And let it fall in the midst of their camp,
Round about their habitations.
29 So they ate and were surfeited,
And their desires He brought to them.

30 They were not estranged from their desires
Their food was yet in their mouths.

31 And the wrath of God rose against them,
And slew the fattest of them,
And struck down the young men of Israel.
32 For all this they sinned yet more,
And believed not in His wonders.
33 So He made their days to vanish like a breath,
And their years in suddenness.

34 When He slew them, then they inquired after Him,
And returned and sought God earnestly.
35 And they remembered that God was their rock,
And God Most High their redeemer.
36 And they flattered Him with their mouth,
And with their tongue they lied to Him,
37 And their heart was not steadfast with Him,
And they were not faithful to His covenant.

38 But He is compassionate, covers iniquity, and destroys not;
Yea, many a time He takes back His anger,
And rouses not all His wrath.
39 So He remembered that they were [but] flesh,
A wind that goes and comes not again.

40 How often did they provoke Him in the wilderness,
Did they grieve Him in the desert!
41 Yea, again and again they tempted God,
And the Holy One of Israel they vexed.
42 They remembered not His hand,
The day when He set them free from the adversary,
43 When He set forth His signs in Egypt,
And His wonders in the field of Zoan.
44 And He turned to blood their Nile streams,
And their streams they could not drink.

45 He sent amongst them flies that devoured them,
And frogs that destroyed them.
46 And He gave their increase to the caterpillar,
And their toil to the locust.
47 He killed their vines with hail,
And their sycamores with frost. [?]
48 And He gave their cattle up to the hail,
And their flocks to the lightnings.

49 He sent against them the heat of His anger,
Wrath and indignation and trouble,
A mission of angels of evil.
50 He levelled a path for His anger,
He spared not their souls from death,
But delivered over their life to the pestilence.
51 And He smote all the first-born of Egypt,
The firstlings of [their] strength in the tents of Ham.

52 And He made His people go forth like sheep,
And guided them like a flock in the desert.
53 And He led them safely, that they did not fear,
And the sea covered their enemies.
54 And He brought them to His holy border,
This mountain, which His right hand had won.
55 And He drove out the nations before them,
And allotted them by line as an inheritance,
And made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents.

56 But they tempted and provoked God Most High,
And His testimonies they did not keep.
57 And they turned back and were faithless like their fathers,
They were turned aside like a deceitful bow;
58 And they provoked Him to anger with their high places,
And with their graven images they moved Him to jealousy.
59 God heard and was wroth,
And loathed Israel exceedingly.

60 So that He rejected the habitation of Shiloh,
The tent [which] He had pitched among men.
61 And He gave His strength to captivity,
And His beauty into the hand of the adversary.
62 And He delivered His people to the sword,
And against His inheritance He was wroth.
63 Their young men the fire devoured,
And their maidens were not praised in the marria
64 Their priests fell by the sword,
And their widows made no lamentation.

65 Then the Lord awoke as one that had slept,
Like a warrior shouting because of wine.
66 And He beat His adversaries back,
He put on them a perpetual reproach.

67 And He loathed the tent of Joseph,
And the tribe of Ephraim He did not choose.
68 But He chose the tribe of Judah,
Mount Zion, which He loved.

69 And He built His sanctuary like [heavenly] heights,
Like the earth which He has founded for ever.
70 And He chose David His servant,
And took him from the sheepfolds;
71 From following the ewes that give suck, He brought him
To feed Jacob His people,
And Israel His inheritance.
72 So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart,
And with the skilfulness of his hands he guided them.

THIS psalm is closely related to Psalms cv.–cvii. Like them, it treats the history of Israel, and especially the Exodus and wilderness wanderings, for purposes of edification, rebuke, and encouragement. The past is held up as a mirror to the present generation. It has been one long succession of miracles of mercy met by equally continuous ingratitude, which has ever been punished by national calamities. The psalm departs singularly from chronological order. It arranges its contents in two principal masses, each introduced by the same formula (vv. 12, 43) referring to "wonders in Egypt and the field of Zoan." But the first mass has nothing to do with Egypt, but begins with the passage of the Red Sea, and is wholly occupied with the wilderness. The second group of wonders begins in ver. 44 with the plagues of Egypt, touches lightly on the wilderness history, and then passes to the early history of Israel when settled in the land, and finishes with the establishment of David on the throne. It is difficult to account for this singular *bouleversement* of the history. But the conjecture may be hazarded that its reason lies in the better illustration

of continual interlacing of mercy and unthankfulness afforded by the events in the wilderness, than by the plagues of Egypt. That interlacing is the main point on which the psalmist wishes to lay stress, and therefore he begins with the most striking example of it. The use of the formula in ver. 12 looks as if his original intention had been to follow the order of time. Another peculiarity is the prominence given to Ephraim, both in ver. 9 as a type of faithlessness, and in ver. 67 as rejected in favour of Judah. These references naturally point to the date of the psalm as being subsequent to the separation of the kingdoms; but whether it is meant as rebuke to the northern kingdom, or as warning to Judah from the fate of Ephraim, is not clear. Nor are there materials for closer determination of date. The tone of the closing reference to David implies that his accession belongs to somewhat remote times.

There are no regular strophes, but a tendency to run into paragraphs of four verses, with occasional irregularities.

Vv. 1–4 declare the singer's didactic purpose. He deeply feels the solidarity of the nation through all generations—how fathers and children are knit by mystic ties, and by possession of an eternal treasure, the mighty deeds of God, of which they are bound to pass on the record from age to age. The history of ancient days is "a parable" and a "riddle" or "dark saying," as containing examples of great principles, and lessons which need reflection to discern and draw out. From that point of view, the psalmist will sum up the past. He is not a chronicler, but a religious teacher. His purpose is edification, rebuke, encouragement, the deepening of godly fear and obedience. In a word, he means to give the spirit of the nation's history.

Vv. 5–8 base this purpose on God's declared will that the knowledge of His deeds for Israel might be handed down from fathers to sons. The obligations of parents for the religious training of their children, the true bond of family unity, the ancient order of things when oral tradition was the principal means of preserving national history, the peculiarity of this nation's annals, as celebrating no heroes and recording only the deeds of God by men, the contrast between the changing bearers of the story and the undying deeds which they had to tell, are all expressed in these verses, so pathetic in their gaze upon the linked series of short-lived men, so stern in their final declaration that Divine commandment and mercy had been in vain, and that, instead of a tradition of goodness, there had been a transmission of stubbornness and departure from God, repeating itself with tragic uniformity. The devout poet, who knows what God meant family life to be and to do, sadly recognises the grim contrast presented by its reality. But yet he will make one more attempt to break the flow of evil from father to son. Perhaps his contemporaries will listen and shake themselves clear of this entail of disobedience.

The reference to Ephraim in vv. 9–11 is not to be taken as alluding to any cowardly retreat from actual battle. Ver. 9 seems to be a purely figurative way of expressing what is put without a metaphor in the two following verses. Ephraim's revolt from God's covenant was like the conduct of soldiers, well armed and refusing to charge the foe. The better their weapons, the greater the cowardice and ignominy of the recreants. So the faithlessness of Ephraim was made darker in criminality by its knowledge of God and experience of His mercy. These should have

knit the tribe to Him. A general truth of wide application is implied—that the measure of capacity is the measure of obligation. Guilt increases with endowment, if the latter is misused. A poor soldier, with no weapon but a sling or a stick, might sooner be excused for flight than a fully armed archer. The mention of Ephraim as prominent in faithlessness may be an allusion to the separation of the kingdoms. That allusion has been denied on the ground that it is the wilderness history which is here before the psalmist's mind. But the historical retrospect does not begin till ver. 12, and this introduction may well deal with an event later than those detailed in the following verses. Whether the revolt of the Ten Tribes is here in view or not, the psalmist sees that the wayward and powerful tribe of Ephraim had been a centre of religious disaffection, and there is no reason why his view should not be believed, or should be supposed to be due to mere prejudiced hostility.

The historical details begin with ver. 12, but, as has been noticed above, the psalmist seems to change his intention of first narrating the wonders in Egypt, and passes on to dilate on the wilderness history. "The field of Zoan" is the territory of the famous Egyptian city of Tzan, and seems equivalent to the Land of Goshen. The wonders enumerated are the familiar ones of the passage of the Red Sea, the guidance by the pillar of cloud and fire, and the miraculous supply of water from the rock. In vv. 15, 16, the poet brings together the two instances of such supply, which were separated from each other by the forty years of wandering, the first having occurred at Horeb in the first year, and the second at Kadesh in the last year. The two words "rocks," in ver. 15, and "cliff," in ver. 16, are

taken from the two narratives of these miracles, in Exod. xvii. and Numb. xx.

The group of four verses (13–16) sets forth God's mighty deeds; the next quartet of verses (17–20) tells of Israel's requital. It is significant of the thoughts which filled the singer's heart, that he begins the latter group with declaring that, notwithstanding such tokens of God's care, the people "went on to sin yet more," though he had specified no previous acts of sin. He combines widely separated instances of their murmurings, as he had combined distant instances of God's miraculous supply of water. The complaints which preceded the fall of the manna and the first supply of quails (Exod. xvi.), and those which led to the second giving of these (Numb. xi.) are thrown together, as one in kind. The speech put into the mouths of the murmurers in vv. 19, 20, is a poetic casting into bitter, blasphemous words of the half-conscious thoughts of the faithless, sensuous crowd. They are represented as almost upbraiding God with His miracle, as quite unmoved to trust by it, and as thinking that it has exhausted His power. When they were half dead with thirst, they thought much of the water, but now they depreciate that past wonder as a comparatively small thing. So, to the churlish heart, which cherishes eager desires after some unattained earthly good, past blessings diminish as they recede, and leave neither thankfulness nor trust. There is a dash of intense bitterness and ironical making light of their relation to God in their question, "Can He provide flesh for *His people*?" Much good that name has done us, starving here! The root of all this blasphemous talk was sensuous desire; and because the people yielded to it, they "tempted God"—that is, they "unbelievingly

and defiantly demanded, instead of trustfully waiting and praying" (Delitzsch). To ask food for their desires was sin; to ask it for their need would have been faith.

In ver. 21 the allusion is to the "fire of the Lord," which, according to Numb. xi. 3, burnt in the camp, just before the second giving of quails. It comes in here out of chronological order, for the sending of manna follows it; but the psalmist's didactic purpose renders him indifferent to chronology. The manna is called "corn of heaven" and "bread of the Mighty Ones"—*i.e.*, angels, as the LXX. renders the word. Both designations point to its heavenly origin, without its being necessary to suppose that the poet thought of angels as really eating it. The description of the fall of the quails (vv. 26-29) is touched with imaginative beauty. The word rendered above "made to go forth" is originally applied to the breaking up of an encampment, and that rendered "guided" to a shepherd's leading of his flock. Both words are found in the Pentateuch, the former in reference to the wind that brought the quails (Numb. xi. 31), the latter in reference to that which brought the plague of locusts (Exod. x. 13). So the winds are conceived of as God's servants, issuing from their tents at His command, and guided by Him as a shepherd leads his sheep. "He let it fall in the midst of their camp" graphically describes the dropping down of the wearied, storm-beaten birds.

Vv. 30–33 paint the swift punishment of the people's unbelief, in language almost identical with Numb. xi. 33. The psalmist twice stigmatises their sin as "lust," and uses the word which enters into the tragical name given to the scene of the sin and the punishment—Kibroth-Hat *taavah* (the graves of Lust). In vv. 32, 33,

the faint-hearted despondency after the return of the spies, and the punishment of it by the sentence of death on all that generation, seem to be alluded to.

The next group of four verses describes the people's superficial and transient repentance, "When He slew them they sought Him"—*i.e.*, when the fiery serpents were sent among them. But such seeking after God, which is properly not seeking Him at all, but only seeking to escape from evil, neither goes deep nor lasts long. Thus the end of it was only lip reverence, proved to be false by life, and soon ended. "Their heart was not steadfast." The pressure being removed, they returned to their habitual position, as all such penitents do.

From the midst of this sad narrative of faithlessness, springs up, like a fountain in a weary land, or a flower among half-cooled lava blocks, the lovely description of God's forbearance in vv. 38, 39. It must not be read as if it merely carried on the narrative, and was in continuation of the preceding clauses. The psalmist does not say "He *was* full of compassion," though that would be much, in the circumstances; but he is declaring God's eternal character. His compassions are unfailing. It is always His wont to cover sin and to spare. Therefore He exercised these gracious forbearances towards those obstinate transgressors. He was true to His own compassion in remembering their mortality and feebleness. What a melancholy sound, as of wind blowing among forgotten graves, has that summing up of human life as "a breath that goes and comes not again"!

With ver. 40 the second portion of the psalm may be regarded as beginning. The first group of historical details dealt first with God's mercies, and passed on

to man's requital. The second starts with man's ingratitude, which it paints in the darkest colours, as provoking Him, grieving Him, tempting Him, and vexing Him. The psalmist is not afraid to represent God as affected with such emotions by reason of men's indifference and unbelief. His language is not to be waved aside as anthropomorphic and antiquated. No doubt, we come nearer to the unattainable truth, when we conceive of God as grieved by men's sins and delighting in their trust, than when we think of Him as an impassive Infinitude, serenely indifferent to tortured or sinful hearts. For is not His name of names Love?

The psalmist traces Israel's sin to forgetfulness of God's mercy, and thus glides into a swift summing up of the plagues of Egypt, regarded as conducing to Israel's deliverance. They are not arranged chronologically, though the list begins with the first. Then follow three of those in which animals were the destroyers: namely, the fourth, that of flies; the second, that of frogs; and the eighth, that of locusts. Then comes the seventh, that of hail; and, according to some commentators, the fifth, that of the murrain, in ver. 49, followed by the tenth in ver. 51. But the grand, sombre imagery of ver. 49 is too majestic for such application. It rather sums up the whole series of plagues, likening them to an embassy (lit., a sending) of angels of evil. They are a grim company to come forth from His presence—Wrath, Indignation, and Trouble. The same power which sent them out on their errand prepared a way before them; and the crowning judgment, which, in the psalmist's view was also the crowning mercy, was the death of the first-born.

The next quartet of verses (vv. 52–55) passes lightly

over the wilderness history and the settlement in the land, and hastens on to a renewed narration of repeated rebellion, which occupies the next group (vv. 56–59). These verses cover the period from the entrance on Canaan to the fall of the sanctuary of Shiloh, during which there was a continual tendency to relapse into idolatry. That is the special sin here charged against the Israel of the time of the Judges. The figure of a "deceitful bow," in ver. 57, well describes the people as failing to fulfil the purpose of their choice by God. As such a weapon does not shoot true, and makes the arrow fly wide, however well aimed and strongly drawn, so Israel foiled all Divine attempts, and failed to carry God's message to the world, or to fulfil His will in themselves. Hence the next verses tell, with intense energy and pathos, the sad story of Israel's humiliation under the Philistines. The language is extraordinarily strong in its description of God's loathing and rejection of the nation and sanctuary, and is instinct with sorrow, blended with stern recognition of His righteousness in judgment. What a tragic picture the psalmist draws! Shiloh, the dwelling-place of God, empty for evermore; the "Glory"—that is, the Ark—in the enemy's hands; everywhere stiffening corpses; a pall of silence over the land; no brides and no joyous bridal chaunts; the very priests massacred, unlamented by their widows, who had wept so many tears already that the fountain of them was dried up, and even sorrowing love was dumb with horror and despair!

The two last groups of verses paint God's great mercy in delivering the nation from such misery. The daring figure of His awaking as from sleep and dashing upon Israel's foes, who are also His, with a shout like

that of a hero stimulated by wine, is more accordant with Eastern fervour than with our colder imagination; but it wonderfully expresses the sudden transition from a period, during which God seemed passive and careless of His people's wretchedness, to one in which His power flashed forth triumphant for their defence. The prose fact is the long series of victories over the Philistines and other oppressors, which culminated in the restoration of the Ark, the selection of Zion as its abode, which involved the rejection of Shiloh and consequently of Ephraim (in whose territory Shiloh was) and the accession of David. The Davidic kingdom is, in the psalmist's view, the final form of Israel's national existence; and the sanctuary, like the kingdom, is perpetual as the lofty heavens or the firm earth. Not were his visions vain, for that kingdom subsists and will subsist for ever, and the true sanctuary, the dwelling-place of God among men, is still more closely intertwined with the kingdom and its King than the psalmist knew. The perpetual duration of both is, in truth, the greatest of God's mercies, outshining all earlier deliverances; and they who truly have become the subjects of the Christ, the King of Israel and of the world, and who dwell with God in His house, by dwelling with Jesus, will not rebel against Him any more, nor ever forget His wonders, but faithfully tell them to the generations to come.

PSALM LXXIX.

1 O God, [the] heathen have come into Thine inheritance,
They have profaned Thy holy Temple,
They have made Jerusalem heaps of stones.
2 They have given the corpses of Thy servants [as] meat to the fowls of the heavens,
The flesh of Thy favoured Ones to the beasts of the earth.
3 They have poured out their blood like water round Jerusalem,
And there was none to bury [them].
4 We have become a reproach to our neighbours,
A scoff and a scorn to those round us.

5 How long, Jehovah, wilt Thou be angry for ever?
[How long] shall Thy jealousy burn like fire?
6 Pour out Thy wrath upon the heathen who know Thee not,
And upon [the] kingdoms which call not upon Thy name.
7 For they have eaten up Jacob,
And his pasture have they laid waste.
8 Remember not against us the iniquities of those before us,
Speedily let Thy compassions [come to] meet us,
For we are brought very low.

9 Help us, O God, for the sake of the glory of Thy name,
And deliver us, and cover over our sins for the sake of Thy name.
10 Why should the heathen say, Where is their God?
Let there be known among the heathen before our eyes
The revenging of the blood of Thy servants which is poured out.
11 Let there come before Thee the groaning of the captive,
According to the greatness of Thine arm preserve the sons of death.
12 And return to our neighbours sevenfold into their bosom
Their reproach [with] which they have reproached Thee, O Lord.

13 And we, we the people and the flock of Thy pasture,
Will thank Thee for ever;
To generation after generation will we recount Thy praise

THE same national agony which was the theme of Psalm lxxiv. forced the sad strains of this psalm from the singer's heart. There, the profanation of the Temple, and here, the destruction of the city, are the more prominent. There, the dishonour to God; here, the distresses of His people, are set forth. Consequently, confession of sin is more appropriate here, and prayers for pardon blend with those for deliverance. But the tone of both psalms is the same, and there are similarities of expression which favour, though they do not demand, the hypothesis that the author is the same. Such similarities are the "how long" (lxxiv. 10 and lxxix. 5); the desecration of the Temple (lxxiv. 3, 7, and lxxix. 1) the giving over to wild beasts (lxxiv. 19, and lxxix. 2); the reproach of God (lxxiv. 10, 18, 22, and lxxix. 12). The comparison of Israel to a flock is found in both psalms, but in others of the Asaph group also.

The same remarks which were made as to the date of the former psalm apply in this case. Two arguments have, however, been urged against the Maccabean date. The first is that drawn from the occurrence of vv. 6, 7, in Jer. x. 25. It is contended that Jeremiah is in the habit of borrowing from earlier writers, that the verse immediately preceding that in question is quoted from Psalm vi. 1, and that the connection of the passage in the psalm is closer than in the prophet, and, therefore, that the words are presumably *in situ* here, as also that the verbal alterations are such as to suggest that the prophet rather than the psalmist is the adapter. But, on the other hand, Hupfeld maintains that the connection in Jeremiah is the closer. Not much weight can be attached to that point, for neither prophet nor poet can be tied down to cool

concatenation of sentences. Delitzsch claims the verbal alterations as indubitable proofs of the priority of the prophet, and maintains that "the borrower betrays himself" by changing the prophet's words into less accurate and elegant ones, and by omissions which impair "the soaring fulness of Jeremiah's expressions." The critics who hold that the psalm refers to the Chaldean invasion, and that Jeremiah has borrowed from it, have to face a formidable difficulty. The psalm must have been written after the catastrophe: the prophecy preceded it. How then can the prophet be quoting the psalm? The question has not been satisfactorily answered, nor is it likely to be.

A second argument against the Maccabean date is based upon the quotation of ver. 3 in 1 Macc. vii. 16, which it introduces by the usual formula of quotation from Scripture. It is urged that a composition so recent as the psalm would be, if of Maccabean date, would not be likely to be thus referred to. But this argument confuses the date of occurrence recorded in 1 Maccabees with the date of the record; and there is no improbability in the writer of the book quoting as Scripture a psalm which had sprung from the midst of the tragedy which he narrates.

The strophical division is not perfectly clear, but it is probably best to recognise three strophes of four verses each, with an appended verse of conclusion. The first spreads before God His people's miseries. The second and third are prayer for deliverance and confession of sin; but they differ, in that the former strophe dwells mainly upon the wished-for destruction of the enemy, and the latter upon the rescue of Israel, while a subordinate diversity is that ancestral sins are confessed in the one, and those of the present genera-

tion in the other. Ver. 13 stands out of the strophe scheme as a kind of epilogue.

The first strophe vividly describes the ghastly sights that wrung the psalmist's heart, and will, as he trusts, move God's to pity and help. The same thought as was expressed in Psalm lxxiv. underlies the emphatic repetition of "Thy" in this strophe—namely, the implication of God's fair name in His people's disasters. "*Thine* inheritance" is invaded, and "*Thy* holy Temple" defiled by the "heathen." The corpses of "*Thy* servants" lie unburied, torn by vultures' beaks and jackals' claws. The blood of "*Thy* favoured Ones" saturates the ground. It was not easy to hold fast by the reality of God's special relation to a nation thus apparently deserted, but the psalmist's faith stood even such a strain, and is not dashed by a trace of doubt. Such times are the test and triumph of trust. If genuine, it will show brightest against the blackest background. The word in ver. 1 rendered "heathen" is usually translated "nations," but here evidently connotes idolatry (ver. 6). Their worship of strange gods, rather than their alien nationality, makes their invasion of God's inheritance a tragic anomaly. The psalmist remembers the prophecy of Micah (iii. 12) that Jerusalem should become heaps, and sadly repeats it as fulfilled at last. As already noticed, ver. 3 is quoted in 1 Macc. vii. 16, 17, and ver. 4 is found in Psalm xliv. 13, which is by many commentators referred to the Maccabean period.

The second strophe passes to direct petition, which, as it were, gives voice to the stiffened corpses strewing the streets, and the righteous blood crying from the ground. The psalmist goes straight to the cause of calamity—the anger of God—and, in the close of the

strophe, confesses the sins which had kindled it. Beneath the play of politics and the madness of Antiochus, he discerned God's hand at work. He reiterates the fundamental lesson, which prophets were never weary of teaching, that national disasters are caused by the anger of God, which is excited by national sins. That conviction is the first element in his petitions. A second is the twin conviction that the "heathen" are used by God as His instrument of chastisement, but that, when they have done their work, they are called to account for the human passion—cruelty, lust of conquest, and the like—which impelled them to it. Even as they poured out the blood of God's people, they have God's wrath poured out on them, because "they have eaten up Jacob."

The same double point of view is frequently taken by the prophets: for example, in Isaiah's magnificent prophecy against "the Assyrian" (x. 5 *seq.*), where the conqueror is first addressed as "the rod of Mine anger," and then his "punishment" is foretold, because, while executing God's purpose, he had been unconscious of his mission, and had been gratifying his ambition. These two convictions go very deep into "the philosophy of history." Though modified in their application to modern states and politics, they are true in substance still. The Goths who swept down on Rome, the Arabs who crushed a corrupt Christianity, the French who stormed across Europe, were God's scavengers, gathered vulture-like round carrion, but they were each responsible for their cruelty, and were punished "for the fruit of their stout hearts."

The closing verse of the strophe (ver. 8) is intimately connected with the next, which we take as beginning the third strophe; but this connection does not set

aside the strophical division, though it somewhat obscures it. The distinction between the similar petitions of vv. 8, 9, is sufficient to warrant our recognition of that division, even whilst acknowledging that the two parts coalesce more closely than usual. The psalmist knows that the heathen have been hurled against Israel because God is angry; and he knows that God's anger is no arbitrarily kindled flame, but one lit and fed by Israel's sins. He knows, too, that there is a fatal entail by which the iniquities of the fathers are visited on the children. Therefore, he asks first that these ancestral sins may not be "remembered," nor their consequences discharged on the children's heads. "The evil that men do lives after them," and history affords abundant instances of the accumulated consequences of ancestors' crimes lighting on descendants that had abandoned the ancient evil, and were possibly doing their best to redress it. Guilt is not transmitted, but results of wrong are; and it is one of the tragedies of history that "one soweth and another reapeth" the bitter fruit. Upon one generation may, and often does, come the blood of all the righteous men that many generations have slain (Matt. xxiii. 35).

The last strophe (vv. 9–12) continues the strain begun in ver. 8, but with significant deepening into confession of the sins of the existing generation. The psalmist knows that the present disaster is no case of the fathers having eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth being set on edge, but that he and his contemporaries had repeated the fathers' trangressions. The ground of his plea for cleansing and deliverance is the glory of God's name, which he emphatically puts at the end of both clauses of ver. 9. He repeats the same thought in another form in the question of ver. 10,

"Why should the heathen say, Where is their God?" If Israel, sinful though it is, and therefore meriting chastisement, is destroyed, there will be a blot on God's name, and the "heathen" will take it as proof, not that Israel's God was just, but that He was too feeble or too far off to hear prayers or to send succours. It is bold faith which blends acknowledgment of sins with such a conviction of the inextricable intertwining of God's glory and the sinners' deliverance. Lowly confession is wonderfully wedded to confidence that seems almost too lofty. But the confidence is in its inmost core as lowly as the confession, for it disclaims all right to God's help, and clasps His name as its only but sufficient plea.

The final strophe dwells more on the sufferings of the survivors than the earlier parts of the psalm do, and in this respect contrasts with Psalm lxxiv., which is all but entirely silent as to these. Not only does the spilt blood of dead confessors cry for vengeance, since they died for their faith, as "Thy servants," but the groans and sighs of the living who are captives, and "sons of death"—*i.e.*, doomed to die, if unrescued by God—appeal to Him. The expressions "the groaning of the captive" and "the sons of death" occur in Psalm cii. 20, from which, if this is a composition of Maccabean date, they are here quoted. The strophe ends with recurring to the central thought of both this and the companion psalm—the reproach on God from His servants' calamities—and prays that the enemies' taunts may be paid back into their bosoms sevenfold—*i.e.*, in fullest measure.

The epilogue in ver 13 has the image of a flock, so frequent in the Asaph psalms, suggesting tender thoughts of the shepherd's care and of his obliga-

tions. Deliverance will evoke praise, and, instead of the sad succession of sin and suffering from generation to generation, the solidarity of the nation will be more happily expressed by ringing songs, transmitted from father to son, and gathering volume as they flow from age to age.

PSALM LXXX.

1 Shepherd of Israel, give ear,
Thou who leddest Joseph like a flock,
Thou that sittest [throned upon] the cherubim, shine forth.
2 Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up Thy strength,
And come for salvation for us.
3 O God, restore us,
And cause Thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.

4 Jehovah, God [of] Hosts,
How long wilt Thou be angry against the prayer of Thy people?
5 Thou hast made them eat tears [as] bread,
And hast given them to drink [of] tears in large measure.
6 Thou makest us a strife to our neighbours,
And our enemies mock to their hearts' content.
7 God [of] Hosts, restore us,
And cause Thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.

8 A vine out of Egypt didst Thou transplant,
Thou didst drive out the nations and plant it.
9 Thou didst clear a place before it,
And it threw out its roots and filled the land.
10 The mountains were covered with its shadow,
And its branches [were like] the cedars of God.
11 It spread its boughs [even] unto the sea,
And to the River its shoots.

12 Why hast Thou broken down its fences,
So that all who pass on the way pluck from it?
13 The boar of the wood roots it up,
And the beasts of the field feed on it.
14 God [of] Hosts, turn, we beseech Thee,
Look from heaven and see,
And visit this vine.

15 And protect what Thy right hand has planted,
And the son whom Thou madest strong for Thyself.
16 Burned with fire is it—cut down;
At the rebuke of Thy countenance they perish.
17 Let Thy hand be upon the man of Thy right hand,
Upon the son of man [whom] Thou madest strong for Thyself.
18 And we will not go back from Thee;
Revive us, and we will invoke Thy name.
19 Jehovah, God [of] Hosts, restore us,
And cause Thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.

THIS psalm is a monument of some time of great national calamity; but its allusions do not enable us to reach certainty as to what that calamity was. Two striking features of it have been used as clues to its occasion—namely, the designation of the nation as "Joseph," and the mention of the three tribes in ver. 2. Calvin, Delitzsch, Hengstenberg, and others are led thereby to regard it as a prayer by an inhabitant of Judah for the captive children of the northern kingdom; while others, as Cheyne, consider that only the Persian period explains the usage in question. The name of "Joseph" is applied to the whole nation in other Asaph psalms (lxxvii. 15; lxxxi. 5). It is tempting to suppose, with Hupfeld, that this nomenclature indicates that the ancient antagonism of the kingdoms has passed away with the captivity of the Ten Tribes, and that the psalmist, a singer in Judah, looks wistfully to the ideal unity, yearns to see breaches healed, and the old associations of happier days, when "Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh" encamped side by side in the desert, and marched one after the other, renewed in a restored Israel. If this explanation of the mention of the tribes is adopted, the psalm falls in some period after the destruction of the northern kingdom, but prior to that of Judah. The prayer in the refrain "turn us" might,

indeed, mean "bring us back from exile," but may as accurately be regarded as asking for restored prosperity —an explanation which accords better with the rest of the psalm. We take the whole, then, as a prayer for the nation, conceived of in its original, long-broken unity. It looks back to the Divine purpose as expressed in ancient deeds of deliverance, and prays that it may be fulfilled, notwithstanding apparent thwarting. Closer definition of date is unattainable.

The triple refrain in vv. 3, 7, 19, divides the psalm into three unequal parts. The last of these is disproportionately long, and may be further broken up into three parts, of which the first (vv. 8–11) describes the luxuriant growth of Israel under the parable of a vine, the second (vv. 12–14) brings to view the bitter contrast of present ruin, and, with an imperfect echo of the refrain, melts into the petitioning tone of the third (vv. 15–19), which is all prayer.

In the first strophe "Shepherd of Israel" reminds us of Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh, in which he invoked "the God who shepherded me all my life long" to "bless the lads," and of the title in Gen. xlix. 24, "the shepherd, the stone of Israel." The comparison of the nation to a flock is characteristic of the Asaph psalms, and here refers to the guidance of the people at the Exodus. Delitzsch regards the notions of the earthly and heavenly sanctuary as being blended in the designation of God as sitting throned on the cherubim, but it is better to take the reference as being to His dwelling in the Temple. The word rendered "shine forth" occurs in Psalm l. 2, where it expresses His coming from "Zion," and so it does here. The same metaphor underlies the subsequent petition in ver. 3. In both God is thought of as light, and the

manifestation of His delivering help is likened to the blazing out of the sun from behind a cloud.

In reference to the mention of the tribes in ver. 2, we need only add to what has been already said, that the petitions of ver. 1, which look back to the wilderness marches, when the Ark led the van, naturally suggested the mention of the three tribes who were together reckoned as "the camp of Ephraim," and who, in the removal of the encampment, "set forth third"—that is, immediately in the rear of the tabernacle. The order of march explains not only the collocation here, but the use of the word "Before." Joseph and Benjamin were children of the same mother, and the schism which parted their descendants is, to the psalmist's faith, as transient as unnatural. Once again shall the old unity be seen, when the brothers' sons shall again dwell and fight side by side, and God shall again go forth before them for victory.

The prayer of the refrain, "turn us," is not to be taken as for restoration from exile, which is negatived by the whole tone of the psalm, nor as for spiritual quickening, but simply asks for the return of the glories of ancient days. The petition that God would let His face shine upon the nation alludes to the priestly benediction (Numb. vi. 25), thus again carrying us back to the wilderness. Such a flashing forth is all that is needed to change blackest night into day. To be "saved" means here to be rescued from the assaults of hostile nations. The poet was sure that Israel's sole defence was God, and that one gleam of His face would shrivel up the strongest foes, like unclean, slimy creatures which writhe and die in sunshine. The same conviction is valid in a higher sphere. Whatever elevation of meaning is given to

"saved," the condition of it is always this—the manifestation of God's face. That brings light into all dark hearts. To behold that light, and to walk in it, and to be transformed by beholding, as they are who lovingly and steadfastly gaze, is salvation.

A piteous tale of suffering is wailed forth in the second strophe. The peculiar accumulation of the Divine names in vv. 4, 19, is found also in Psalms lix. 5 and lxxxiv. 8. It is grammatically anomalous, as the word for God (Elohim) does not undergo the modification which would show that the next word is to be connected with it by "of." Hence, some have regarded "Ts'bhaoth" (hosts) as being almost equivalent to a proper name of God, which it afterwards undoubtedly became; while others have explained the construction by supposing the phrase to be elliptical, requiring after "God" the supplement "God of." This accumulation of Divine names is by some taken as a sign of late date. Is it not a mark of the psalmist's intensity rather than of his period? In accordance with the Elohistic character of the Asaph psalms, the common expression "Jehovah of Hosts" is expanded; but the hypothesis that the expansion was the work of a redactor is unnecessary. It may quite as well have been that of the author.

The urgent question "How long?" is not petulant impatience, but hope deferred, and, though sick at heart, still cleaving to God and remonstrating for long-protracted calamities. The bold imagery of ver. 4 *b* cannot well be reproduced in translation. The rendering "wilt Thou be angry?" is but a feeble reproduction of the vigorous original, which runs "wilt Thou smoke?" Other psalms (*e.g.*, lxxiv. 1) speak of God's anger as smoking, but here the figure is applied to

God Himself. What a contrast it presents to the petition in the refrain! That "light" of Israel has become "as a flaming fire." A terrible possibility of darkening and consuming wrath lies in the Divine nature, and the very emblem of light suggests it. It is questionable whether the following words should be rendered "against the prayer of Thy people," or "while Thy people are praying" (Delitzsch). The former meaning is in accordance with the Hebrew, with other Scripture passages, and with the tone of the psalm, and is to be preferred, as more forcibly putting the anomaly of an unanswering God. Ver. 5 presents the national sorrows under familiar figures. The people's food and drink were tears. The words of *a* may either be rendered "bread of tears"—*i.e.*, eaten with, or rather consisting of, tears; or, as above, "tears [as] bread." The word rendered "in large measure" means "the third part"—"of some larger measure." It is found only in Isa. xl. 12. "The third part of an ephah is a puny measure for the dust of the earth, [but] it is a large measure for tears" (Delitzsch, *in loc.*). Ver. 6 adds one more touch to the picture—gleeful neighbours cynically rejoicing to their hearts' content (lit., for themselves) over Israel's calamities. Thus, in three verses, the psalmist points to an angry God, a weeping nation, and mocking foes, a trilogy of woe. On all he bases an urgent repetition of the refrain, which is made more imploring by the expanded name under which God is invoked to help. Instead of the simple "God," as in ver. 3, he now says "God of Hosts." As sense of need increases, a true suppliant goes deeper into God's revealed character.

From ver. 8 onwards the parable of the vine as representing Israel fills the singer's mind. As has

been already noticed, this part of the psalm may be regarded as one long strophe, the parts of which follow in orderly sequence, and are held closely together, as shown by the recurrence of the refrain at the close only. Three stages are discernible in it—a picture of what has been, the contrast of what is now, and a prayer for speedy help. The emblem of the vine, which has received so great development in the prophets, and has been hallowed for ever by our Lord's use of it, seems to have been suggested to the psalmist by the history of Joseph, to which he has already alluded. For, in Jacob's blessing (Gen. xlix. 22 *seqq.*), Joseph is likened to a fruitful bough. Other Old Testament writers have drawn out the manifold felicities of the emblem as applied to Israel. But these need not concern us here, where the point is rather God's husbandry and the vine's growth, both of which are in startling contrast with a doleful present. The figure is carried out with much beauty in detail. The Exodus was the vine's transplanting; the destruction of the Canaanites was the grubbing up of weeds to clear the ground for it; the numerical increase of the people was its making roots and spreading far. In ver. 10*b* the rendering may be either that adopted above, or "And the cedars of God [were covered with] its branches." The latter preserves the parallelism of clauses and the unity of representation in vv. 10, 11, which will then deal throughout with the spreading growth of the vine. But the cedars would not have been called "of God,"—which implies their great size, —unless their dimensions had been in point, which would not be the case if they were only thought of as espaliers for the vine. And the image of its running over the great trees of Lebanon is unnatural. The

rendering as above is to be preferred, even though it somewhat mars the unity of the picture. The extent of ground covered by the vine is described, in ver. 11, as stretching from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates (Deut. xi. 24; 1 Kings iv. 24). Such had been the glories of the past; and they had all been the work of God's hand.

In ver. 12 the miserable contrast of present desolation is spread before God, with the bold and yet submissive question "Why?" The vineyard wall is thrown down, and the vine lies exposed to every vagrant passenger, and to every destructive creature. Swine from the woods burrow at its roots, and "whatever moves on the plain" (Psalm l. 11, the only other place where the expression occurs) feeds on it. The parallelism forbids the supposition that any particular enemy is meant by the wild boar. Hupfeld would transpose ver. 16 so as to stand after ver. 13, which he thinks improves the connection, and brings the last part of the psalm into symmetrical form, in three equal parts, containing four verses each. Cheyne would put vv. 14, 15, before vv. 12, 13, and thereby secures more coherence and sequence. But accuracy in these matters is not to be looked for in such highly emotional poetry, and perhaps a sympathetic ear may catch in the broken words a truer ring than in the more orderly arrangement of them by critics.

Ver. 14 sounds like an imperfect echo of the refrain significantly modified, so as to beseech that God would "turn" Himself, even as He had been implored to "turn" His people. The purpose of His turning is that He may "look and see" the condition of the desolated vineyard, and thence be moved to interfere for its restoration. The verse may be regarded as

closing one of the imperfectly developed strophes of this last part; but it belongs in substance to the following petitions, though in form it is more closely connected with the preceding verses. The picture of Israel's misery passes insensibly into prayer, and the burden of that prayer is, first, that God would behold the sad facts, as the preliminary to His acting in view of them.

The last part (vv. 15–19) is prayer for God's help, into which forces itself one verse (16), recurring to the miseries of the nation. It bursts in like an outcrop of lava, revealing underground disturbance and fires. Surely that interruption is more pathetic and natural than is the result obtained by the suggested transpositions. The meaning of the word in ver. 15 rendered above "protect" is doubtful, and many commentators would translate it as a noun, and regard it as meaning "plant," or, as the A.V., "vineyard." The verse would then depend on the preceding verb in ver. 14, "visit." But this construction is opposed by the copula (*and*) preceding, and it is best to render "protect," with a slight change in the vocalisation. There may be an allusion to Jacob's blessing in ver. 15 *b*, for in it (Gen. xlix. 22) Joseph is called a "fruitful bough"—lit., "son." If so, the figure of the vine is retained in ver. 15 *b* as well as in *a*.

The apparent interruption of the petitions by ver. 16 is accounted for by the sharp pang that shot into the psalmist's heart, when he recalled, in his immediately preceding words, the past Divine acts, which seemed so contradicted now. But the bitterness, though it surges up, is overcome, and his petitions return to their former strain in ver. 17, which pathetically takes up, as it were, the broken thread, by repeating "right

hand" from ver. 15 *a*, and "whom Thou madest strong for Thyself" from ver. 15 *b*. Israel, not an individual, is the "man of Thy right hand," in which designation, coupled with "son," there may be an allusion to the name of Benjamin (ver. 2), the "son of the right hand." Human weakness and Divine strength clothing it are indicated in that designation for Israel "the son of man whom Thou madest strong for Thyself." The inmost purpose of God's gifts is that their recipients may be "the secretaries of His praise." Israel's sacred calling, its own weakness, and the strength of the God who endows it are all set forth, not now as lessons to it, but as pleas with Him, whose gifts are without repentance, and whose purposes cannot be foiled by man's unworthiness or opposition.

The psalm closes with a vow of grateful adhesion to God as the result of His renewed mercy. They who have learned how bitter a thing it is to turn away from God, and how blessed when He turns again to them, and turns back their miseries and their sins, have good reason for not again departing from Him. But if they are wise to remember their own weakness, they will not only humbly vow future faithfulness, but earnestly implore continual help; since only the constant communication of a Divine quickening will open their lips to call upon God's name.

The refrain in its most expanded form closes the psalm. Growing intensity of desire and of realisation of the pleas and pledges hived in the name are expressed by its successive forms,—God; God of Hosts; Jehovah, God of Hosts. The faith that grasps all that is contained in that full-toned name already feels the light of God's face shining upon it, and is sure that its prayer for salvation is not in vain.

PSALM LXXXI.

1 Shout for joy to God our strength,
Shout aloud to the God of Jacob.
2 Lift up the song, and sound the timbrel,
The pleasant lyre with the harp.
3 Blow the trumpet on the new moon,
On the full moon, for the day of our feast.
4 For this is a statute for Israel,
An ordinance of the God of Jacob.
5 For a testimony in Joseph He appointed it,
When He went forth over the land of Egypt.
—A language which I know not I hear.

6 I removed his shoulder from the burden,
His hands were freed from the basket.
7 In straits thou didst call and I delivered thee,
I answered thee in the secret place of thunder,
I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Selah.
8 Hear, My people, and I will witness to thee;
O Israel, would that thou wouldest hearken to Me!
9 There shall be no strange god in thee,
And thou shalt not bow down to an alien god.
10 I, I am Jehovah thy God,
Who brought thee up from the land of Egypt.
Open wide thy mouth, and I will fill it.

11 But My people hearkened not to My voice,
And Israel did not yield to Me.
12 Then I let them go in the stubbornness of their heart,
That they might walk in their own counsels.

13 Would that My people would hearken to Me,
That Israel would walk in My ways!
14 Easily would I humble their enemies,
And against their adversaries turn My hand.

15 The haters of Jehovah would come feigning to Him,
But their time should endure for ever.
16 And He would feed thee with the fat of wheat,
And with honey from the rock would I satisfy thee.

THE psalmist summons priests and people to a solemn festival, commemorative of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, and sets forth the lessons which that deliverance teaches, the learning of which is the true way of keeping the feast. There has been much discussion as to which feast is in the psalmist's mind. That of Tabernacles has been widely accepted as intended, chiefly on the ground that the first day of the month in which it occurred was celebrated by the blowing of trumpets, as the beginning of the civil year. This practice is supposed to account for the language of ver. 3, which seems to imply trumpet-blowing both at new and full moon. But, on other grounds, the Passover is more likely to be intended, as the psalm deals with the manifestations of Divine power attending the beginning of the Exodus, which followed the first Passover, as well as with those during the desert sojourn, which alone were commemorated by the feast of Tabernacles. True, we have no independent knowledge of any trumpet-blowing on the first day of the Passover month (Nisan); but Delitzsch and others suggest that from this psalm it may be inferred "that the commencement of each month, and more especially the commencement of the month (Nisan), which was at the same time the commencement of the ecclesiastical year, was signalised by the blowing of horns." On the whole, the Passover is most probably the feast in question.

Olshausen, followed by Cheyne, regards the psalm as made up of two fragments (vv. 1–5 *a*, and 5 *c*–16).

But surely the exhortations and promises of the latter portion are most relevant to the summons to the festival contained in the former part, and there could be no more natural way of preparing for the right commemoration of the deliverance than to draw out its lessons of obedience and to warn against departure from the delivering God. Definiteness as to date is unattainable. The presupposed existence of the full Temple ceremonial shows that the psalm was not written in exile, nor at a time of religious persecution. Its warning against idolatry would be needless in a post-exilic psalm, as no tendency thereto existed after the return from captivity. But beyond such general indications we cannot go. The theory that the psalm is composed of two fragments exaggerates the difference between the two parts into which it falls. These are the summons to the feast (vv. 1–5), and the lessons of the feast (vv. 6–16).

Delitzsch suggests that the summons in ver. 1 is addressed to the whole congregation; that in ver. 2 to the Levites, the appointed singers and musicians; and that in ver. 3 to the priests who are intrusted with blowing the Shophar, or horn (Josh. vi. 4, and 2 Chron. xx. 28). One can almost hear the tumult of joyful sounds, in which the roar of the multitude, the high-pitched notes of singers, the deeper clash of timbrels, the twanging of stringed instruments, and the hoarse blare of rams' horns, mingle in concordant discord, grateful to Eastern ears, however unmusical to ours. The religion of Israel allowed and required exuberant joy. It sternly rejected painting and sculpture, but abundantly employed music, the most ethereal of the arts, which stirs emotions and longings too delicate and deep for speech. Whatever

differences in form have necessarily attended the progress from the worship of the Temple to that of the Church, the free play of joyful emotion should mark the latter even more than the former. Decorum is good, but not if purchased by the loss of ringing gladness. The psalmist's summons has a meaning still.

The reason for it is given in vv. 4, 5 *a*. It—*i.e.*, the feast (not the musical accompaniments)—is appointed by God. The psalmist employs designations for it, which are usually applied to "the word of the Lord"; statute, ordinance, testimony, being all found in Psalms xix., cxix., with that meaning. A triple designation of the people corresponds with these triple names for the feast. *Israel*, *Jacob*, and *Joseph* are synonyms, the use of the last of these having probably the same force here as in the preceding psalm—namely, to express the singer's longing for the restoration of the shattered unity of the nation. The summons to the feast is based, not only on Divine appointment, but also on Divine purpose in that appointment. It was "a testimony," a rite commemorative of a historical fact, and therefore an evidence of it to future times. There is no better proof of such a fact than a celebration of it, which originates contemporaneously and continues through generations. The feast in question was thus simultaneous with the event commemorated, as ver. 5 *b* tells. It was God, not Israel, as is often erroneously supposed, who "went forth." For the following preposition is not "from," which might refer to the national departure, but "over" or "against," which cannot have such a reference, since Israel did not, in any sense, go "over" or "against" the land. God's triumphant forth-putting of power over the whole

land, especially in the death of the first-born, on the night of the Passover, is meant to be remembered for ever, and is at once the fact commemorated by the feast, and a reason for obeying His appointment of it.

So far the thoughts and language are limpid, but ver. 5 *c* interrupts their clear flow. Who is the speaker thus suddenly introduced? What is the "language" (lit., lip) which he "knew not"? The explanation implied by the A.V. and R.V., that the collective Israel speaks, and that the reference is, as in Psalm cxiv. 1, to the "strange language" of the Egyptians, is given by most of the older authorities, and by Ewald and Hengstenberg, but has against it the necessity for the supplement "where," and the difficulty of referring the "I" to the nation. The more usual explanation in modern times is that the speaker is the psalmist, and that the language which he hears is the voice of God, the substance of which follows in the remainder of the psalm. As in Job iv. 16 Eliphaz could not discern the appearance of the mysterious form that stood before his eyes, and thus its supernatural character is suggested, so the psalmist hears an utterance of a hitherto unknown kind, which he thus implies to have been Divine. God Himself speaks, to impress the lessons of the past, and to excite the thoughts and feelings which would rightly celebrate the feast. The glad noises of song, harp, and trumpet are hushed; the psalmist is silent, to hear that dread Voice, and then with lowly lips he repeats so much of the majestic syllables as he could translate into words which it was possible for a man to utter. The inner coherence of the two parts of the psalm is, on this explanation, so obvious, that there is no need nor room for the hypothesis of two fragments having been fused into one.

The Divine Voice begins with recapitulating the facts which the feast was intended to commemorate—namely, the act of emancipation from Egyptian bondage (ver. 6), and the miracles of the wilderness sojourn (ver. 7). The compulsory labour, from which God delivered the people, is described by two terms, of which the former (burden) is borrowed from Exodus, where it frequently occurs (Exod. i. 11, v. 4, vi. 6), and the latter (basket) is by some supposed to mean the wicker-work implement for carrying, which the monuments show was in use in Egypt (so LXX., etc.), and by others to mean an earthen vessel, as "an example of the work in clay in which the Israelites were engaged" (Hupfeld). The years of desert wandering are summed up, in ver. 7, as one long continuance of benefits from God. Whenever they cried to Him in their trouble, He delivered them. He spoke to them "from the secret place of thunder" ("*My thunder-covert*," Cheyne). That expression is generally taken to refer to the pillar of cloud, but seems more naturally to be regarded as alluding to the thick darkness, in which God was shrouded on Sinai, when He spoke His law amid thunderings and lightnings. "The proving at the waters of Meribah" is, according to the connection and in harmony with Exod. xvii. 6, to be regarded as a benefit. "It was meant to serve the purpose of binding Israel still more closely to its God" (Baethgen). It is usually assumed that, in this reference to "the waters of Meribah," the two similar incidents of the miraculous supply of water—one of which occurred near the beginning of the forty years in the desert, at "Massah and Meribah" (Exod. xvii. 7), and the other at "the waters of Meribah," near Kadesh, in the fortieth year—have been blended, or, as Cheyne says, "confused." But there is no need to suppose that

there is any confusion, for the words of the psalm will apply to the latter miracle as well as to the former, and, if the former clause refers to the manifestations at Sinai, the selection of an incident at nearly the end of the wilderness period is natural. The whole stretch of forty years is thereby declared to have been marked by continuous Divine care. The Exodus was begun, continued, and ended amid tokens of His watchful love. The Selah bids the listener meditate on that prolonged revelation.

That retrospect next becomes the foundation of a Divine exhortation to the people, which is to be regarded as spoken originally to Israel in the wilderness, as ver. 11 shows. Perowne well designates these verses (8–10) "a discourse within a discourse." They put into words the meaning of the wilderness experience, and sum up the laws spoken on Sinai, which they in part repeat. The purpose of God's lavish benefits was to bind Israel to Himself. "Hear, My people," reminds us of Deut. v. 1, vi. 4. "I will bear witness to thee" here means rather solemn warning to, than testifying against, the person addressed. With infinite pathos, the tone of the Divine Speaker changes from that of authority to pleading and the utterance of a yearning wish, like a sigh. "Would that thou wouldest hearken!" God desires nothing so earnestly as that; but His Divine desire is tragically and mysteriously foiled. The awful human power of resisting His voice and of making His efforts vain, the still more awful fact of the exercise of that power, were clear before the psalmist, whose daring anthropopathy teaches a deep lesson, and warns us against supposing that men have to do with an impassive Deity. That wonderful utterance of Divine wish is almost a parenthesis. It

gives a moment's glimpse into the heart of God, and then the tone of command is resumed. "In ver. 9 the keynote of the revelation of the law from Sinai is given; the fundamental command which opens the Decalogue demanded fidelity towards Jehovah, and forbade idolatry, as the sin of sins" (Delitzsch). The reason for exclusive devotion to God is based in ver. 10, as in Exod. xx. 2, the fundamental passage, on His act of deliverance, not on His sole Divinity. A theoretic Monotheism would be cold; the consciousness of benefits received from One Hand alone is the only key that will unlock a heart's exclusive devotion and lay it at His feet. And just as the commandment to worship God alone is founded on His unaided delivering might and love, so it is followed by the promise that such exclusive adhesion to Him will secure the fulfilment of the boldest wishes, and the satisfying of the most clamant or hungry desires. "Open wide thy mouth, and I will fill it." It is folly to go to strange gods for the supply of needs, when God is able to give all that every man can wish. We may be well content to cleave to Him alone, since He alone is more than enough for each and for all. Why should *they* waste time and strength in seeking for supplies from many, who can find all they need in One? They who put Him to the proof, and find Him enough, will have, in their experience of His sufficiency, a charm to protect them from all vagrant desire to "go further and fare worse." The best defence against temptations to stray from God is the possession by experience, of His rich gifts that meet all desires. That great saying teaches, too, that God's bestowals are practically measured by men's capacity and desire. The ultimate limit of them is His own limitless grace; but the working limit in

each individual is the individual's receptivity, of which his expectancy and desire are determining factors.

In vv. 11, 12, the Divine Voice laments the failure of benefits and commandments and promises to win Israel to God. There is a world of baffled tenderness and almost wondering rebuke in the designation of the rebels as "My people." It would have been no cause of astonishment if other nations had not listened; but that the tribes bound by so many kindnesses should have been deaf is a sad marvel. Who should listen to "My voice" if "My people" do not? The penalty of not yielding to God is to be left unyielding. The worst punishment of sin is the prolongation and consequent intensifying of the sin. A heart that wilfully closes itself against God's pleadings brings on itself the nemesis, that it becomes incapable of opening, as a self-torturing Hindoo fakir may clench his fist so long, that at last his muscles lose their power, and it remains shut for his lifetime. The issue of such "stubbornness" is walking in their own counsels, the practical life being regulated entirely by self-originated and God-forgetting dictates of prudence or inclination. He who will not have the Divine Guide has to grope his way as well as he can. There is no worse fate for a man than to be allowed to do as he chooses. "The ditch," sooner or later, receives the man who lets his active powers, which are in themselves blind, be led by his understanding, which he has himself blinded by forbidding it to look to the One Light of Life.

In ver. 13 the Divine Voice turns to address the joyous crowd of festal worshippers, exhorting them to that obedience which is the true keeping of the feast, and holding forth bright promises of the temporal blessings which, in accordance with the fundamental

conditions of Israel's prosperity, should follow thereon. The sad picture of ancient rebellion just drawn influences the language in this verse, in which "My people," "hearken," and "walk" recur. The antithesis to walking in one's own counsels is walking in God's ways, suppressing native stubbornness, and becoming docile to His guidance. The highest blessedness of man is to have a will submissive to God's will, and to carry out that submission in all details of life. Self-engineered paths are always hard, and, if pursued to the end, lead into the dark. The listening heart will not lack guidance, and obedient feet will find God's way the way of peace which steadily climbs to unfading light.

The blessings attached in the psalm to such conformity with God's will are of an external kind, as was to be expected at the Old Testament stage of revelation. They are mainly two—victory and abundance. But the precise application of ver. 15 *b* is doubtful. Whose "time" is to "endure for ever"? There is much to be said in favour of the translation "that so their time might endure for ever," as Cheyne renders, and for understanding it, as he does, as referring to the enemies who yield themselves to God, in order that they "might be a never-exhausted people." But to bring in the purpose of the enemies' submission is somewhat irrelevant, and the clause is probably best taken to promise length of days to Israel. In ver. 16 the sudden change of persons in *a* is singular, and, according to the existing vocalisation, there is an equally sudden change of tenses, which induces Delitzsch and others to take the verse as recurring to historical retrospect. The change to the third person is probably occasioned, as Hupfeld

suggests, by the preceding naming of Jehovah, or may have been due to an error. Such sudden changes are more admissible in Hebrew than with us, and are very easily accounted for, when God is represented as speaking. The momentary emergence of the psalmist's personality would lead him to say "He," and the renewed sense of being but the echo of the Divine Voice would lead to the recurrence to the "I," in which God speaks directly. The words are best taken as in line with the other hypothetical promises in the preceding verses. The whole verse looks back to Deut. xxxii. 13, 14. "Honey from the rock" is not a natural product; but, as Hupfeld says, the parallel "oil out of the flinty rock," which follows in Deuteronomy, shows that "we are here, not on the ground of the actual, but of the ideal," and that the expression is a hyperbole for incomparable abundance. Those who hearken to God's voice will have all desires satisfied and needs supplied. They will find furtherance in hindrances, fertility in barrenness; rocks will drop honey and stones will become bread.

PSALM LXXXII.

1 God stands in the congregation of God,
In the midst of the gods He judges.

2 How long will ye judge injustice,
And accept the persons of wicked men? Se'lah.
3 Right the weak and the orphan,
Vindicate the afflicted and the poor.
4 Rescue the weak and needy,
From the hand of the wicked deliver [them].

5 They know not, they understand not,
In darkness they walk to and fro,
All the foundations of the earth totter.
6 I myself have said, Ye are gods,
And sons of the Most High are ye all.
7 Surely like men shall ye die,
And like one of the princes shall ye fall.

8 Arise, O God, judge the earth,
For Thou, Thou shalt inherit all the nations.

IN Psalm l. God is represented as gathering His people together to be judged; in this psalm He has gathered them together for His judgment on judges. The former psalm begins at an earlier point of the great Cause than this one does. In it, unnamed messengers go forth to summons the nation; in this, the first verse shows us the assembled congregation, the accused, and the Divine Judge standing in "the midst" in statuesque immobility. An awe-inspiring

pause intervenes, and then the silence is broken by a mighty voice of reproof and admonition (vv. 2–4). The speaker may be the psalmist, but the grand image of God as judging loses much of its solemnity and appropriateness, unless these stern rebukes and the following verses till the end of ver. 7 are regarded as His voice of judgment. Ver. 5 follows these rebukes with "an indignant aside from the Judge" (Cheyne), evoked by obstinate deafness to His words; and vv. 6, 7, pronounce the fatal sentence on the accused, who are condemned by their own refusal to hearken to Divine remonstrances. Then, in ver. 8, after a pause like that which preceded God's voice, the psalmist, who has been a silent spectator, prays that what he has heard in the inward ear, and seen with the inward eye, may be done before the nations of the world, since it all belongs to Him by right.

The scene pictured in ver. 1 has been variously interpreted. "The congregation of God" is most naturally understood according to the parallel in Psalm l., and the familiar phrase "the congregation of Israel" as being the assembled nation. Its interpretation and that of the "gods" who are judged hang together. If the assembly is the nation, the persons at the bar can scarcely be other than those who have exercised injustice on the nation. If, on the other hand, the "gods" are ideal or real angelic beings, the assembly will necessarily be a heavenly one. The use of the expressions "The congregation of Jehovah" (Numb. xxvii. 17, xxxi. 16; Josh. xxii. 16, 17) and "Thy congregation" (Psalm lxxiv. 2) makes the former interpretation the more natural, and therefore exercises some influence in determining the meaning of the other disputed word. The interpretation of "gods" as

angels is maintained by Hupfeld; and Bleek, followed by Cheyne, goes the full length of regarding them as patron angels of the nations. But, as Baethgen says, "that angels should be punished with death is a thought which lies utterly beyond the Old Testament sphere of representation," and the incongruity can hardly be reckoned to be removed by Cheyne's remark, that, since angels are in other places represented as punished, "it is only a step further" to say that they are punished with death. If, however, these "gods" are earthly rulers, the question still remains whether they are Jewish or foreign judges? The latter opinion is adopted chiefly on the ground of the reference in ver. 8 to a world-embracing judicial act, which, however, by no means compels its acceptance, since it is entirely in accordance with the manner of psalmists to recognise in partial acts of Divine retribution the operation in miniature of the same Divine power, which will one day set right all wrongs, and, on occasion of the smaller manifestation of Divine righteousness, to pray for a universal judgment. There would be little propriety in summoning the national assembly to behold judgments wrought on foreign rulers, unless these alien oppressors were afflicting Israel, of which there is no sure indications in the psalm. The various expressions for the afflicted in vv. 3, 4, are taken, by the supporters of the view that the judges are foreigners, to mean the whole nation as it groaned under their oppression, but there is nothing to show that they do not rather refer to the helpless in Israel.

Our Lord's reference to ver. 6 in John x. 34–38 is, by the present writer, accepted as authoritatively settling both the meaning and the ground of the

remarkable name of "gods" for human judges. It does not need that we should settle the mystery of His emptying Himself, or trace the limits of His human knowledge, in order to be sure that He spoke truth with authority, when He spoke on such a subject as His own Divine nature, and the analogies and contrasts between it and the highest human authorities. His whole argument is worthless, unless the "gods" in the psalm are men. He tells us why that august title is applied to them—namely, because to them "the word of God came." They were recipients of a Divine word, constituting them in their office; and, in so far as they discharged its duties, their decrees were God's word ministered by them. That is especially true in a theocratic state such as Israel, where the rulers are, in a direct way, God's vicegerents, clothed by Him with delegated authority, which they exercise under His control. But it is also true about all who are set in similar positions elsewhere. The office is sacred, whatever its holders are.

The contents of the psalm need little remark. In vv. 2–4 God speaks in stern upbraiding and command. The abrupt pealing forth of the Divine Voice, without any statement of who speaks, is extremely dramatic and impressive. The judgment hall is filled with a hushed crowd. No herald is needed to proclaim silence. Strained expectance sits on every ear. Then the silence is broken. These authoritative accents can come but from one speaker. The crimes rebuked are those to which rulers, in such a state of society as was in Israel, are especially prone, and such as must have been well-nigh universal at the time of the psalmist. They were no imaginary evils against which these sharp arrows were launched. These princes were like those gibbeted

for ever in Isa. i.—loving gifts and following after rewards, murderers rather than judges, and fitter to be "rulers of Sodom" than of God's city. They had prostituted their office by injustice, had favoured the rich and neglected the poor, had been deaf to the cry of the helpless, had steeled their hearts against the miseries of the afflicted, and left them to perish in the gripe of the wicked. Such is the indictment. Does it sound applicable to angels?

For a moment the Divine Voice pauses. Will its tones reach any consciences? No. There is no sign of contrition among the judges, who are thus solemnly being judged. Therefore God speaks again, as if wondering, grieved, and indignant "at the blindness of their hearts," as His Son was when His words met the same reception from the same class. Ver. 5 might almost be called a Divine lament over human impenitence, ere the Voice swells into the fatal sentence. One remembers Christ's tears, as He looked across the valley to the city glittering in the morning sun. His tears did not hinder His pronouncing its doom; nor did His pronouncing its doom hinder His tears. These judges were without knowledge. They walked in darkness, because they walked in selfishness, and never thought of God's judgment. Their gait was insolent, as the form of the word "walk to and fro" implies. And, since they who were set to be God's representatives on earth, and to show some gleam of His justice and compassion, were ministers of injustice and vicegerents of evil, fostering what they should have crushed, and crushing whom they should have fostered, the foundations of society were shaken, and, unless these were swept away, it would be dissolved into chaos. Therefore the sentence must fall, as it does in vv. 6, 7.

The grant of dignity is withdrawn. They are stripped of their honours, as a soldier of his uniform before he is driven from his corps. The judge's robe, which they have smirched, is plucked off their shoulders, and they stand as common men.

PSALM LXXXIII.

1 O God, let there be no rest to Thee,
Be not dumb, and keep not still, O God.
2 For, behold, Thy enemies make a tumult,
And they who hate Thee lift up the head.
3 Against Thy people they make a crafty plot,
And consult together against Thy hidden ones.
4 They say, Come, and let us cut them off from [being] a nation,
And let the name of Israel be remembered no more.

5 For they consult together with one heart,
Against Thee they make a league:
6 The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites,
Moab and the Hagarenes,
7 Gebal and Ammon and Amalek,
Philistia with the dwellers in Tyre;
8 Asshur also has joined himself to them,
They have become an arm to the children of Lot. Selah.

9 Do Thou to them as [to] Midian,
As [to] Sisera, [to] Jabin at the brook Kishon,
10 [Who] were destroyed at Endor,
[Who] became manure for the land.
11 Make them, their nobles, like Oreb and like Zeeb,
And like Zebah and like Zalmunnah all their princes,
12 Who say, Let us take for a possession to ourselves
The habitations of God.

13 My God, make them like a whirl of dust,
Like stubble before the wind,
14 Like fire [that] burns [the] forest,
And like flame [that] scorches [the] mountains.

15 So pursue them with Thy storm,
And with Thy tempest strike them with panic.
16 Fill their face with dishonour,
That they may seek Thy name, Jehovah.

17 Let them be ashamed and panic-struck for ever,
And let them be abashed and perish;
18 And let them know that Thou, [even] Thy name, Jehovah, alone,
Art the Most High over all the earth.

THIS psalm is a cry for help against a world in arms. The failure of all attempts to point to a period when all the allies here represented as confederate against Israel were or could have been united in assailing it, inclines one to suppose that the enumeration of enemies is not history, but poetic idealisation. The psalm would then be, not the memorial of a fact, but the expression of the standing relation between Israel and the outlying heathendom. The singer masses together ancient and modern foes of diverse nationalities and mutual animosities, and pictures them as burying their enmities and bridging their separations, and all animated by one fell hatred to the Dove of God, which sits innocent and helpless in the midst of them. There are weighty objections to this view; but no other is free from difficulties even more considerable. There are two theories which divide the suffrages of commentators. The usual assignment of date is to the league against Jehoshaphat recorded in 2 Chron. xx. But it is hard to find that comparatively small local confederacy of three peoples in the wide-reaching alliance described in the psalm. Chronicles enumerates the members of the league as being "the children of Moab and the children of Ammon, and with them some of the Ammonites," which last

unmeaning designation should be read, as in the LXX., "the Me'unim," and adds to these Edom (2 Chron. xx. 2, corrected text). Even if the contention of the advocates of this date for the psalm is admitted, and "the Me'unim" are taken to include the Arab tribes, whom the psalmist calls Ishmaelites and Hagarenes, there remains the fact that he names also Philistia, Amalek, Tyre, and Asshur, none of whom is concerned in the alliance against Jehoshaphat. It was, in fact, confined to eastern and south-eastern nations, with whom distant western tribes could have no common interest. Nor is the other view of the circumstances underlying the psalm free from difficulty. It advocates a Maccabean date. In 1 Macc. v. it is recorded that the nations round about were enraged at the restoration of the altar and dedication of the Temple after its pollution by Antiochus Epiphanes, and were ready to break out in hostility. Cheyne points to the occurrence in Maccabees of six of the ten names mentioned in the psalm. But of the four not mentioned, two are Amalek and Asshur, both of which had been blotted out of the roll of nations long before the Maccabees' era. "The mention of Amalek," says Cheyne, "is half-Haggadic, half-antiquarian." But what should Haggadic or antiquarian elements do in such a list? Asshur is explained on this hypothesis as meaning Syria, which is very doubtful, and, even if admitted, leaves unsolved the difficulty that the subordinate place occupied by the nation in question would not correspond to the importance of Syria in the time of the Maccabees. Of the two theories, the second is the more probable, but neither is satisfactory; and the view already stated, that the psalm does not refer to any actual alliance, seems to the present writer the most probable. The

world is up in arms against God's people; and what weapon has Israel? Nothing but prayer.

The psalm naturally falls into two parts, separated by Selah, of which the first (vv. 1–8) describes Israel's extremity, and the second (vv. 9–18) is its supplication.

The psalmist begins with earnest invocation of God's help, beseeching Him to break His apparent inactivity and silence. "Let there be no rest to Thee" is like Isa. lxii. 6. God seems passive. It needs but His Voice to break the dreary silence, and the foes will be scattered. And there is strong reason for His intervention, for they are *His* enemies, who riot and roar like the hoarse chafing of an angry sea, for so the word rendered "make a tumult" implies (Psalm xlvi. 3). It is "Thy people" who are the object of their crafty conspiracy, and it is implied that these are thus hated because they *are* God's people. Israel's prerogative, which evokes the heathen's rage, is the ground of Israel's confidence and the plea urged to God by it. Are we not Thy "hidden ones"? And shall a hostile world be able to pluck us from our safe hiding-place in the hollow of Thy hand? The idea of preciousness, as well as that of protection, is included in the word. Men store their treasures in secret places; God hides His treasures in the "secret of His face," the "glorious privacy of light" inaccessible. How vain are the plotters' whisperings against such a people!

The conspiracy has for its aim nothing short of blotting out the national existence and the very name of Israel. It is therefore high-handed opposition to God's counsel, and the confederacy is against *Him*. The true antagonists are, not Israel and the world, but God and the world. Calmness, courage, and confidence spring in the heart with such thoughts. They who

can feel that they are hid in God may look out, as from a safe islet on the wildest seas, and fear nothing. And all who will may hide in Him.

The enumeration of the confederates in vv. 6–8 groups together peoples who probably were never really united for any common end. Hatred is a very potent cement, and the most discordant elements may be fused together in the fire of a common animosity. What a motley assemblage is here! What could bring together in one company Ishmaelites and Tyrians Moab and Asshur? The first seven names in the list of allies had their seats to the east and south-east o Palestine. Edom, Moab, Ammon, and Amalek were ancestral foes, the last of which had been destroyed in the time of Hezekiah (1 Chron. iv. 43). The mention of descendants of Ishmael and Hagar, nomad Arab tribes to the south and east, recalls their ancestors' expulsion from the patriarchal family. Gebal is probably the mountainous region to the south of the Dead Sea. Then the psalmist turns to the west, to Philistia, the ancient foe, and Tyre, "the two peoples of the Mediterranean coast, which also appear in Amos (ch. i.; *cf.* Joel iii.) as making common cause with the Edomites against Israel" (Delitzsch). Asshur brings up the rear —a strange post for it to occupy, to be reduced to be an auxiliary to "the children of Lot," *i.e.* Moab and Ammon. The ideal character of this muster-roll is supported by this singular inferiority of position, as well as by the composition of the allied force, and by the allusion to the shameful origin of the two leading peoples, which is the only reference to Lot besides the narrative in Genesis.

The confederacy is formidable, but the psalmist does not enumerate its members merely in order to emphasise

Israel's danger. He is contrasting this miscellaneous conglomeration of many peoples with the Almighty One, against whom they are vainly banded. Faith can look without a tremor on serried battalions of enemies, knowing that one poor man, with God at his back, outnumbers them all. Let them come from east and west, south and north, and close round Israel; God alone is mightier than they. So, after a pause marked by Selah, in which there is time to let the thought of the multitudinous enemies sink into the soul, the psalm passes into prayer, which throbs with confident assurance and anticipatory triumph. The singer recalls ancient victories, and prays for their repetition. To him, as to every devout man, to-day's exigencies are as sure of Divine help as any yesterday's were, and what God has done is pledge and specimen of what He is doing and will do. The battle is left to be waged by Him alone. The psalmist does not seem to think of Israel's drawing sword, but rather that it should stand still and see God fighting for it. The victory of Gideon over Midian, to which Isaiah also refers as the very type of complete conquest (Isa. ix. 3), is named first, but thronging memories drive it out of the singer's mind for a moment, while he goes back to the other crushing defeat of Jabin and Sisera at the hands of Barak and Deborah (Judg. iv., v.). He adds a detail to the narrative in Judges, when he localises the defeat at Endor, which lies on the eastern edge of the great plain of Esdraelon. In ver. 11 he returns to his first example of defeat—the slaughter of Midian by Gideon. Oreb (raven) and Zeeb (wolf) were in command of the Midianites, and were killed by the Ephraimites in the retreat. Zebah and Zalmunnah were kings of Midian, and fell by Gideon's own hand

(Judg. viii. 21). The psalmist bases his prayer for such a dread fate for the foes on their insolent purpose and sacrilegious purpose of making the dwellings (or, possibly, the pastures) of God their own property. Not because the land and its peaceful homes belonged to the suppliant and his nation, but because they were God's, does he thus pray. The enemies had drawn the sword; it was permissible to pray that they might fall by the sword, or by some Divine intervention, since such was the only way of defeating their God-insulting plans.

The psalm rises to high poetic fervour and imaginative beauty in the terrible petitions of vv. 13–16. The word rendered "whirling dust" in ver. 13 is somewhat doubtful. It literally means *a rolling thing*, but what particular thing of the sort is difficult to determine. The reference is perhaps to "spherical masses of dry weeds which course over the plains." Thomson ("Land and Book," 1870, p. 563) suggests the wild artichoke, which, when ripe, forms a globe of about a foot in diameter. "In autumn the branches become dry and as light as a feather, the parent stem breaks off at the ground, and the wind carries these vegetable globes whithersoever it pleaseth. At the proper season thousands of them come scudding over the plain, rolling, leaping, bounding." So understood, the clause would form a complete parallel with the next, which compares the fleeing foe to stubble, not, of course, rooted, but loose and whirled before the wind. The metaphor of ver. 14 is highly poetic, likening the flight of the foe to the swift rush of a forest fire, which licks up (for so the word rendered *scorches* means) the woods on the hillsides, and leaves a bare, blackened space. Still more terrible is the petition in ver. 15, which asks

that God Himself should chase the flying remnants, and beat them down, helpless and panic-striken, with storm and hurricane, as He did the other confederacy of Canaanitish kings, when they fled down the pass of Beth-Horon, and "Jehovah cast down great stones on them from heaven" (Josh. x. 10, 11).

But there is a deeper desire in the psalmist's heart than the enemies' destruction. He wishes that they should be turned into God's friends, and he wishes for their chastisement as the means to that end. "That they may seek Thy face, Jehovah," is the sum of his aspirations, as it is the inmost meaning of God's punitive acts. The end of the judgment of the world, which is continually going on by means of the history of the world, is none other than what this psalmist contemplated as the end of the defeat of that confederacy of God's enemies—that rebels should seek His face, not in enforced submission, but with true desire to sun themselves in its light, and with heart-felt acknowledgment of His Name as supreme through all the earth. The thought of God as standing alone in His majestic omnipotence, while a world is vainly arrayed against Him, which we have traced in vv. 5–7, is prominent in the close of the psalm. The language of ver. 18 is somewhat broken, but its purport is plain, and its thought is all the more impressive for the irregularity of construction. God alone is the Most High. He is revealed to men by His Name. It stands alone, as He in His nature does. The highest good of men is to know that that sovereign Name is unique and high above all creatures, hostile or obedient. Such knowledge is God's aim in punishment and blessing. Its universal extension must be the deepest wish of all who have for themselves learned how strong

a fortress against a world in arms that Name is; and their desires for the foes of God and themselves are not in harmony with God's heart, nor with this psalmist's song, unless they are, that His enemies may be led, by salutary defeat of their enterprises and experience of the weight of God's hand, to bow, in loving obedience, low before the Name which, whether they recognise the fact or not, is high above all the earth.

PSALM LXXXIV.

1 How lovely are Thy dwellings,
Jehovah of Hosts!
2 My soul longs, yea, even languishes, for the courts of Jehovah,
My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.
3 Yea, the sparrow has found a house,
And the swallow a nest for herself, where she lays her young,
Thine altars, Jehovah of Hosts,
My King and my God.
4 Blessed they that dwell in Thy house!
They will be still praising Thee. Selah.

5 Blessed the man whose strength is in Thee,
In whose heart are the ways!
6 [Who] passing through the valley of weeping make it a place of fountains,
Yea, the early rain covers it with blessings.
7 They go from strength to strength,
Each appears before God in Zion.
8 Jehovah, God of Hosts, hear my prayer,
Give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah.

9 [Thou], our shield, behold, O God,
And look upon the face of Thine anointed.
10 For better is a day in Thy courts than a thousand,
Rather would I lie on the threshold in the house of my God,
Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.
11 For Jehovah God is sun and shield,
Grace and glory Jehovah gives,
No good does He deny to them that walk in integrity.
12 Jehovah of Hosts,
Blessed the man that trusts in Thee!

THE same longing for and delight in the sanctuary which found pathetic expression in Psalms xlii., xliii., inspire this psalm. Like these, it is ascribed in

the superscription to the Korahites, whose office of door-keepers in the Temple seems alluded to in ver. 10. To infer, however, identity of authorship from similarity of tone is hazardous. The differences are as obvious as the resemblances. As Cheyne well says, "the notes of the singer of Psalms xlii., xliii., are here transposed into a different key. It is still 'Te saluto, te suspiro,' but no longer 'De longinquo te saluto' (to quote Hildebert)." The longings after God and the sanctuary, in the first part of the psalm, do not necessarily imply exile from the latter, for they may be felt when we are nearest to Him, and are, in fact, an element in that nearness. It is profitless to inquire what were the singer's circumstances. He expresses the perennial emotions of devout souls, and his words are as enduring and as universal as the aspirations which they so perfectly express. No doubt the psalm identifies enjoyment of God's presence with the worship of the visible sanctuary more closely than we have to do, but the true object of its longing is God, and so long as spirit is tied to body the most spiritual worship will be tied to form. The psalm may serve as a warning against premature attempts to dispense with outward aids to inward communion.

It is divided into three parts by the Selahs. The last verse of the first part prepares the way for the first of the second, by sounding the note of "Blessed they," etc., which is prolonged in ver. 5. The last verse of the second part (ver. 8) similarly prepares for the first of the third (ver. 9) by beginning the prayer which is prolonged there. In each part there is a verse pronouncing blessing on Jehovah's worshippers, and the variation in the designations of these gives the key to the progress of thought in the psalm.

First comes the blessing on those who dwell in God's house (ver. 4), and that abiding is the theme of the first part. The description of those who are thus blessed is changed, in the second strophe, to "those in whose heart are the [pilgrim] ways," and the joys of the progress of the soul towards God are the theme of that strophe. Finally, for dwelling in and journeying towards the sanctuary is substituted the plain designation of "the man that trusts in Thee," which trust is the impulse to following after God and the condition of dwelling with Him; and its joys are the theme of the third part.

The man who thus interpreted his own psalm had no unworthy conception of the relation between outward nearness to the sanctuary, and inward communion with the God who dwelt there. The psalmist's yearning for the Temple was occasioned by his longing for God. It was God's presence there which gave it all its beauty. Because they were "Thy tabernacles," he felt them to be lovely and lovable, for the word implies both. The abrupt exclamation beginning the psalm is the breaking into speech of thought which had long increased itself in silence. The intensity of his desires is expressed very strikingly by two words, of which the former (*longs*) literally means *grows pale*, and the latter *fails*, or *is consumed*. His whole being, body and spirit, is one cry for the living God. The word rendered "cry out" is usually employed for the shrill cry of joy, and that meaning is by many retained here. But the cognate noun is not infrequently employed for any loud or high-pitched call, especially for fervent prayer (Psalm lxxxviii. 2), and it is better to suppose that this clause expresses emotion substantially parallel to that of the former

one, than that it makes a contrast to it. "The living God" is an expression only found in Psalm xlii., and is one of the points of resemblance between it and this psalm. That Name is more than a contrast with the gods of the heathen. It lays bare the reason for the psalmist's longings. By communion with Him who possesses life in its fulness, and is its fountain for all that live, he will draw supplies of that "life whereof our veins are scant." Nothing short of a real, living Person can slake the immortal thirst of the soul, made after God's own life, and restless till it rests in Him. The surface current of this singer's desires ran towards the sanctuary; the depth of them set towards God; and, for the stage of revelation at which he stood, the deeper was best satisfied through the satisfaction of the more superficial. The one is modified by the progress of Christian enlightenment, but the other remains eternally the same. Alas that the longings of Christian souls for fellowship with God should be so tepid, as compared with the sacred passion of desire which has found imperishable utterance in these glowing and most sincere words!

Ver. 3 has been felt to present grammatical difficulties, which need not detain us here. The easiest explanation is that the happy, winged creatures who have found resting-places are contrasted by the psalmist with himself, seeking, homeless amid creation, for his haven of repose. We have to complete the somewhat fragmentary words with some supplement before "Thine altars," such as "So would I find," or the like. To suppose that he represents the swallows as actually nesting on the altar is impossible, and, if the latter clauses are taken to describe the places where the birds housed and bred, there is nothing to suggest the

purpose for which the reference to them is introduced. If, on the other hand, the poet looks with a poet's eye on these lower creatures at rest in secure shelters, and longs to be like them, in his repose in the home which his deeper wants make necessary for him, a noble thought is expressed with adequate poetic beauty. "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air roosting-places, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." All creatures find environment suited to their need, and are at rest in it, man walks like a stranger on earth, and restlessly seeks for rest. Where but in God is it to be found? Who that seeks it in Him shall fail to find it? What their nests are to the swallows, God is to man. The solemnity of the direct address to God at the close of ver. 3 would be out of place if the altar were the dwelling of the birds, but is entirely natural if the psalmist is thinking of the Temple as the home of his spirit. By the accumulation of sacred and dear names, and by the lovingly reiterated "my," which claims personal relation to God, he deepens his conviction of the blessedness which would be his, were he in that abode of his heart, and lingeringly tells his riches, as a miser might delight to count his gold, piece by piece.

The first part closes with an exclamation which gathers into one all-expressive word the joy of communion with God. They who have it are "blessed," with something more sacred and lasting than happiness, with something deeper and more tranquil than joy, even with a calm delight, not altogether unlike the still, yet not stagnant, rest of supreme felicity which fills the life of the living and ever-blessed God. That thought is prolonged by the music.

The second strophe (vv. 5–8) is knit to the first,

chain-wise, by taking up again the closing strain, "Blessed the man!" But it turns the blessedness in another direction. Not only are they blessed who have found their rest in God, but so also are they who are seeking it. The goal is sweet, but scarcely less sweet are the steps towards it. The fruition of God has delights beyond all that earth can give, but the desire after Him, too, has delights of its own. The experiences of the soul seeking God in His sanctuary are here cast into the image of pilgrim bands going up to the Temple. There may be local allusions in the details. The "ways" in ver. 5 are the pilgrims' paths to the sanctuary. Hupfeld calls the reading "ways" senseless, and would substitute "trust"; but such a change is unnecessary, and tasteless. The condensed expression is not too condensed to be intelligible, and beautifully describes the true pilgrim spirit. They who are touched with that desire which impels men to "seek a better country, that is an heavenly," and to take flight from Time's vanities to the bosom of God, have ever "the ways" in their hearts. They count the moments lost during which they linger, or are anywhere but on the road. Amid calls of lower duties and distractions of many sorts, their desires turn to the path to God. Like some nomads brought into city life, they are always longing to escape. The caged eagle sits on the highest point of his prison, and looks with filmed eye to the free heavens. Hearts that long for God have an irrepressible instinct stinging them to ever-new attainments. The consciousness of "not having already attained" is no pain, when the hope of attaining is strong. Rather, the very blessedness of life lies in the sense of present imperfection, the effort for completeness, and the assurance of reaching it.

Ver. 6 is highly imaginative and profoundly true. If a man has "the ways" in his heart, he will pass through "the valley of weeping," and turn it into a "place of fountains." His very tears will fill the wells. Sorrow borne as a help to pilgrimage changes into joy and refreshment. The remembrance of past grief nourishes the soul which is aspiring to God. God puts our tears into His bottle; we lose the benefit of them, and fail to discern their true intent, unless we gather them into a well, which may refresh us in many a weary hour thereafter. If we do, there will be another source of fertility, plentifully poured out upon our life's path. "The early rain covers it with blessings." Heaven-descended gifts will not be wanting, nor the smiling harvests which they quicken and mature. God meets the pilgrims' love and faith with gently falling influences, which bring forth rich fruit. Trials borne aright bring down fresh bestowments of power for fruitful service. Thus possessed of a charm which transforms grief, and recipients of strength from on high, the pilgrims are not tired by travel, as others are, but grow stronger day by day, and their progressive increase in vigour is a pledge that they will joyously reach their journey's end, and stand in the courts of the Lord's house. The seekers after God are superior to the law of decay. It may affect their physical powers, but they are borne up by an unfulfilled and certain hope, and reinvigorated by continual supplies from above; and therefore, though in their bodily frame they, like other men, faint and grow weary, they shall not utterly fail, but, waiting on Jehovah, "will renew their strength." The fabled fountain of perpetual youth rises at the foot of God's throne, and its waters flow to meet those who journey thither.

Such are the elements of the blessedness of those who seek God's presence; and with that great promise of certain finding of the good and the God whom they seek, the description and the strophe properly ends. But just as the first part prepared the way for the second, so the second does for the third, by breaking forth into prayer. No wonder that the thoughts which he has been dwelling on should move the singer to supplication that these blessednesses may be his. According to some, ver. 8 is the prayer of the pilgrim on arriving in the Temple, but it is best taken as the psalmist's own.

The final part begins with invocation. In ver. 9 "our shield" is in apposition to "God," not the object to "behold." It anticipates the designation of God in ver. 11. But why should the prayer for "Thine anointed" break in upon the current of thought? Are we to say that the psalmist "completes his work by some rhythmical but ill-connected verses" (Cheyne)? There is a satisfactory explanation of the apparently irrelevant petition, if we accept the view that the psalm, like its kindred Psalms xlii., xliii., was the work of a companion of David's in his flight. If so, the king's restoration would be the condition of satisfying the psalmist's longing for the sanctuary. Any other hypothesis as to his date and circumstances fails to supply a connecting link between the main subject of the psalm and this petition. The "For" at the beginning of ver. 10 favours such a view, since it gives the delights of the house of the Lord, and the psalmist's longing to share in them, as the reasons for his prayer that Jehovah would look upon the face of His anointed. In that verse he glides back to the proper theme of the psalm. Life is to be estimated, not according to its length, but according to the richness of its contents. Time is

elastic. One crowded moment is better than a millennium of languid years. And nothing fills life so full or stretches the hours to hold so much of real living, as communion with God, which works, on those who have plunged into its depths, some assimilation to the timeless life of Him with whom "one day is as a thousand years." There may be a reference to the Korachites' function of door-keepers, in that touchingly beautiful choice of the psalmist's, rather to lie on the threshold of the Temple than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. Whether there is or not, the sentiment breathes sweet humility, and deliberate choice. Just as the poet has declared that the briefest moment of communion is in his sight to be preferred to years of earthly delight, so he counts the humblest office in the sanctuary, and the lowest place there, if only it is within the doorway, as better than aught besides. The least degree of fellowship with God has delights superior to the greatest measure of worldly joys. And this man, knowing that, chose accordingly. How many of us know it, and yet cannot say with him, "Rather would I lie on the door-sill of the Temple than sit in the chief places of the world's feasts!"

Such a choice is the only rational one. It is the choice of supreme good, correspondent to man's deepest needs, and lasting as his being. Therefore the psalmist vindicates his preference, and encourages himself in it, by the thoughts in ver. 11, which he introduces with "For." Because God is what He is, and gives what He gives, it is the highest wisdom to take Him for our true good, and never to let Him go. He is "sun and shield." This is the only place in which He is directly called a sun, though the idea conveyed is common. He is "the master light of all our seeing," the fountain of

warmth, illumination, and life. His beams are too bright for human eyes to gaze on, but their effluence is the joy of creation. They who look to Him "shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." What folly to choose darkness rather than light, and, when that Sun is high in the heavens, ready to flood our hearts with its beams, to prefer to house ourselves in gloomy caverns of our own sad thoughts and evil doings! Another reason for the psalmist's choice is that God is a shield. (Compare ver. 9.) Who that knows the dangers and foes that cluster thick round every life can wisely refuse to shelter behind that ample and impenetrable buckler? It is madness to stand in the open field, with arrows whizzing invisible all round, when one step, one heartfelt desire, would place that sure defence between us and every peril. God being such, "grace and glory" will flow from Him to those who seek Him. These two are given simultaneously, not, as sometimes supposed, in succession, as though grace were the sum of gifts for earth, and glory the all-comprehending expression for the higher bestowments of heaven. The psalmist thinks that both are possessed here. *Grace* is the sum of God's gifts, coming from His loving regard to His sinful and inferior creatures. *Glory* is the reflection of His own lustrous perfection, which irradiates lives that are turned to Him, and makes them shine, as a poor piece of broken pottery will, when the sunlight falls on it. Since God is the sum of all good, to possess Him is to possess it all. The one gift unfolds into all things lovely and needful. It is the raw material, as it were, out of which can be shaped, according to transient and multiform needs, everything that can be desired or can bless a soul.

But high as is the psalmist's flight of mystic devotion, he does not soar so far as to lose sight of plain morality, as mystics have often been apt to do. It is the man who walks in his integrity who may hope to receive these blessings. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord"; and neither access to His house nor the blessings flowing from His presence can belong to him who is faithless to his own convictions of duty. The pilgrim paths are paths of righteousness. The psalmist's last word translates his metaphors of dwelling in and travelling towards the house of Jehovah into their simple meaning, "Blessed is the man that *trusteth* in Thee." That trust both seeks and finds God. There has never been but one way to His presence, and that is the way of trust. "I am the way. . . . No man cometh to the Father but by Me." So coming, we shall find, and then shall seek more eagerly and find more fully, and thus shall possess at once the joys of fruition and of desires always satisfied, never satiated, but continually renewed.

PSALM LXXXV.

1 Thou hast become favourable, Jehovah, to Thy land,
Thou hast turned back the captivity of Jacob.
2 Thou hast taken away the iniquity of Thy people,
Thou hast covered all their sin.
3 Thou hast drawn in all Thy wrath,
Thou hast turned Thyself from the glow of Thine anger.

4 Turn us, O God of our salvation,
And cause Thine indignation towards us to cease.
5 For ever wilt Thou be angry with us?
Wilt Thou stretch out Thine anger to generation after generation?
6 Wilt Thou not revive us again,
That Thy people may rejoice in Thee?
7 Show us, Jehovah, Thy loving-kindness,
And give us Thy salvation.

8 I will hear what God, Jehovah, will speak,
For He will speak peace to His people and to His favoured [ones];
Only let them not turn again to folly.
9 Surely near to them who fear Him is His salvation,
That glory may dwell in our land.
10 Loving-kindness and Troth have met together,
Righteousness and Peace have kissed [each other].
11 Troth springs from the earth,
And Righteousness looks down from heaven.
12 Yea, Jehovah will give that which is good,
And our land will give her increase.
13 Righteousness shall go before Him,
And shall make His footsteps a way.

THE outstanding peculiarity of this psalm is its sudden transitions of feeling. Beginning with exuberant thanksgiving for restoration of the nation

(vv. 1–3), it passes, without intermediate gradations, to complaints of God's continued wrath and entreaties for restoration (vv. 4–7), and then as suddenly rises to joyous assurance of inward and outward blessings. The condition of the exiles returned from Babylon best corresponds to such conflicting emotions. The book of Nehemiah supplies precisely such a background as fits the psalm. A part of the nation had returned indeed, but to a ruined city, a fallen Temple, and a mourning land, where they were surrounded by jealous and powerful enemies. Discouragement had laid hold on the feeble company; enthusiasm had ebbed away; the harsh realities of their enterprise had stripped off its imaginative charm; and the mass of the returned settlers had lost heart as well as devout faith. The psalm accurately reflects such a state of circumstances and feelings, and may, with some certitude, be assigned, as it is by most commentators, to the period of return from exile.

It falls into three parts, of increasing length,—the first, of three verses (vv. 1–3), recounts God's acts of mercy already received; the second, of four verses (vv. 4–7), is a plaintive prayer in view of still remaining national afflictions; and the third, of six verses, a glad report by the psalmist of the Divine promises which his waiting ear had heard, and which might well quicken the most faint-hearted into triumphant hope.

In the first strophe one great fact is presented in a threefold aspect, and traced wholly to Jehovah. "Thou hast turned back the captivity of Jacob." That expression is sometimes used in a figurative sense for any restoration of prosperity, but is here to be taken literally. Now, as at first, the restored Israel, like

their ancestors under Joshua, had not won the land by their own arm, but "because God had a favour unto them," and had given them favour in the eyes of those who carried them captive. The restoration of the Jews, seen from the conqueror's point of view, was a piece of state policy, but from that of the devout Israelite was the result of God's working upon the heart of the new ruler of Babylon. The fact is stated in ver. 1; a yet more blessed fact, of which it is most blessed as being a token, is declared in ver. 2.

The psalmist knows that captivity had been chastisement, the issue of national sin. Therefore he is sure that restoration is the sign of forgiveness. His thoughts are running in the same line as in Isa. xl. 2, where the proclamation to Jerusalem that her iniquity is pardoned is connected with the assurance that her hard service is accomplished. He uses two significant words for pardon, both of which occur in Psalm xxxii. In ver. 2 *a* sin is regarded as a weight pressing down the nation, which God's mercy lifts off and takes away; in ver. 2 *b* it is conceived of as a hideous stain or foulness, which His mercy hides, so that it is no longer an offence to heaven. Ver. 3 ventures still deeper into the sacred recesses of the Divine nature, and traces the forgiveness, which in act had produced so happy a change in Israel's position, to its source in a change in God's disposition. "Thou hast drawn in all Thy wrath," as a man does his breath, or, if the comparison may be ventured, as some creature armed with a sting retracts it into its sheath. "Thou hast turned Thyself from the glow of Thine anger" gives the same idea under another metaphor. The word "turn" has a singular fascination for this psalmist. He uses it five times (vv. 1, 3, 4, 6—*lit.*, wilt Thou not turn, quicken us?—and 8). God's

turning from His anger is the reason for Israel's returning from captivity.

The abruptness of the transition from joyous thanksgiving to the sad minor of lamentation and supplication is striking, but most natural, if the psalmist was one of the band of returning exiles, surrounded by the ruins of a happier past, and appalled by the magnitude of the work before them, the slenderness of their resources, and the fierce hostility of their neighbours. The prayer of ver. 4, "Turn us," is best taken as using the word in the same sense as in ver. 1, where God is said to have "turned" the captivity of Jacob. What was there regarded as accomplished is here conceived of as still to be done. That is, the restoration was incomplete, as we know that it was, both in regard to the bulk of the nation, who still remained in exile, and in regard to the depressed condition of the small part of it which had gone back to Palestine. In like manner the petitions of ver. 5 look back to ver. 3, and pray that the anger which there had been spoken of as passed may indeed utterly cease. The partial restoration of the people implied, in the psalmist's view, a diminution rather than a cessation of God's punitive wrath, and he beseeches Him to complete that which He had begun.

The relation of the first to the second strophe is not only that of contrast, but the prayers of the latter are founded upon the facts of the former, which constitute both grounds for the suppliant's hope of answer and pleas with God. He cannot mean to deliver by halves. The mercies received are incomplete; and His work must be perfect. He cannot be partially reconciled, nor have meant to bring His people back to the land, and then leave them to misery. So the

contrast between the bright dawning of the Return and its clouded day is not wholly depressing; for the remembrance of what has been heartens for the assurance that what is shall not always be, but will be followed by a future more correspondent to God's purpose as shown in that past. When we are tempted to gloomy thoughts by the palpable incongruities between God's ideals and man's realisation of them, we may take a hint from this psalmist, and, instead of concluding that the ideal was a phantasm, argue with ourselves that the incomplete actual will one day give way to the perfect embodiment. God leaves no work unfinished. He never leaves off till He has done. His beginnings guarantee congruous endings. He does not half withdraw His anger; and, if He seems to do so, it is only because men have but half turned from their sins. This psalm is rich in teaching as to the right way of regarding the incompleteness of great movements which, in their incipient stages, were evidently of God. It instructs us to keep the Divine intervention which started them clearly in view; to make the shortcomings, which mar them, a subject of lowly prayer; and to be sure that all which He begins He will finish, and that the end will fully correspond to the promise of the beginning. A "day of the Lord" which rose in brightness may cloud over as its hours roll, but "at eventide it shall be light," and none of the morning promise will be unfulfilled.

The third strophe (vv. 8–13) brings solid hopes, based upon Divine promises, to bear on present discouragements. In ver. 8 the psalmist, like Habakkuk (ii. 1), encourages himself to listen to what God will speak. The word "I will hear" expresses resolve or desire, and might be rendered *Let me hear*, or *I would*

hear. Faithful prayer will always be followed by patient and faithful waiting for response from God. God will not be silent, when His servant appeals to Him with recognition of His past mercies, joined with longing that these may be perfected. No voice will break the silence of the heavens; but, in the depths of the waiting soul, there will spring a sweet assurance which comes from God, and is really His answer to prayer, telling the suppliant that "He will speak peace to His people," and warning them not to turn away from Him to other helps, which is folly. "His favoured ones" seems here to be meant as coextensive with "His people." Israel is regarded as having entered into covenant relations with God; and the designation is the pledge that what God speaks will be "peace." That word is to be taken in its widest sense, as meaning, first and chiefly, peace with Him, who has "turned Himself from His anger"; and then, generally, well-being of all kinds, outward and inward, as a consequence of that rectified relation with God.

The warning of ver. 8 *c* is thought by some to be out of place, and an emendation has been suggested, which requires little change in the Hebrew—namely, "to those who have turned their hearts towards Him." This reading is supported by the LXX.; but the warning is perfectly appropriate, and carries a large truth—that the condition of God's speaking of peace is our firm adherence to Him. Once more the psalmist uses his favourite word "turn." God had turned the captivity; He had turned Himself from His anger; the psalmist had prayed Him to turn or restore the people, and to turn and revive them, and now He warns against turning again to folly. There is always danger of relapse in those who have experienced God's

delivering mercy. There is a blessed turning, when they are brought from the far-off land to dwell near God. But there is a possible fatal turning away from the Voice that speaks peace, and the Arm that brings salvation, to the old distance and bondage. Strange that any ears, which have heard the sweetness of His still small Voice whispering Peace, should wish to stray where it cannot be heard! Strange that the warning should ever be required, and tragic that it should so often be despised!

After the introductory ver. 8, the substance of what Jehovah spoke to the psalmist is proclaimed in the singer's own words. The first assurance which the psalmist drew from the Divine word was that God's salvation, the whole fulness of His delivering grace both in regard to external and in inward evils, is ever near to them that fear Him. "Salvation" here is to be taken in its widest sense. It means, negatively, deliverance from all possible evils, outward and inward; and, positively, endowment with all possible good, both for body and spirit. With such fulness of complete blessings, they, and they only, who keep near to God, and refuse to turn aside to foolish confidences, shall be enriched. That is the inmost meaning of what God said to the psalmist; and it is said to all. And that salvation being thus possessed, it would be possible for "glory"—*i.e.*, the manifest presence of God, as in the Shechinah—to tabernacle in the land. The condition of God's dwelling with men is their acceptance of His salvation. That purifies hearts to be temples.

The lovely personifications in vv. 10–13 have passed into Christian poetry and art, but are not clearly apprehended when they are taken to describe the harmonious meeting and co-operation, in Christ's

great work, of apparently opposing attributes of the Divine nature. No such thoughts are in the psalmist's mind. Loving-kindness and Faithfulness or Troth are constantly associated in Scripture as Divine attributes. Righteousness and Peace are as constantly united, as belonging to the perfection of human character. Ver. 10 seems to refer to the manifestation of God's Loving-kindness and Faithfulness in its first clause, and to the exhibition of His people's virtues and consequent happiness in its second. In all God's dealings for His people, His Loving-kindness blends with Faithfulness. In all His people's experience Righteousness and Peace are inseparable. The point of the assurance in ver. 10 is that heaven and earth are blended in permanent amity. These four radiant angels "dwell in the land." Then, in ver. 11, there comes a beautiful inversion of the two pairs of personifications, of each of which one member only reappears. Troth or Faithfulness, which in ver. 10 came into view principally as a Divine attribute, in ver. 11 is conceived of as a human virtue. It "springs out of the earth"—that is, is produced among men. All human virtue is an echo of the Divine, and they who have received into their hearts the blessed results of God's Faithfulness will bring forth in their lives fruits like it in kind. Similarly, Righteousness, which in ver. 10 was mainly viewed as a human excellence, here appears as dwelling in and looking down from heaven, like a gracious angel smiling on the abundance of Faithfulness which springs from earth. Thus "the bridal of the earth and sky" is set forth in these verses.

The same idea is further presented in ver. 12, in its most general form. God gives that which is good, both outward and inward blessings, and, thus fructified

by bestowments from above, earth yields her increase. His gifts precede men's returns. Without sunshine and rain there are no harvests. More widely still, God gives first before He asks. He does not gather where He has not strawed, nor reap what He has not sown. Nor does He only sow, but He "blesses the springing thereof"; and to Him should the harvest be rendered. He gives before we can give. Isa. xlv. 8 is closely parallel, representing in like manner the co-operation of heaven and earth, in the new world of Messianic times.

In ver. 13 the thought of the blending of heaven and earth, or of Divine attributes as being the foundation and parents of their human analogues, is still more vividly expressed. Righteousness, which in ver. 10 was regarded as exercised by men, and in ver. 11 as looking down from heaven, is now represented both as a herald preceding God's royal progress, and as following in His footsteps. The last clause is rendered in different ways, which all have the same general sense. Probably the rendering above is best: "Righteousness shall make His footsteps a way"—that is, for men to walk in. All God's workings among men, which are poetically conceived as His way, have stamped on them Righteousness. That strong angel goes before Him to clear a path for Him, and trace the course which He shall take. That is the imaginative expression of the truth—that absolute, inflexible Righteousness guides all the Divine acts. But the same Righteousness, which precedes, also follows Him, and points His footsteps as the way for us. The incongruity of this double position of God's herald makes the force of the thought greater. It is the poetical embodiment of the truth, that the perfection of man's character and conduct lies

in his being an "imitator of God," and that, however different in degree, our righteousness must be based on His. What a wonderful thought that is, that the union between heaven and earth is so close that God's path is our way! How deep into the foundation of ethics the psalmist's glowing vision pierces! How blessed the assurance that God's Righteousness is revealed from heaven to make men righteous!

Our psalm needs the completion, which tells of that gospel in which "the Righteousness of God from faith is revealed for faith." In Jesus the "glory" has tabernacled among men. He has brought heaven and earth together. In Him God's Loving-kindness and Faithfulness have become denizens of earth, as never before. In Him heaven has emptied its choicest good on earth. Through Him our barrenness and weeds are changed into harvests of love, praise, and service. In Him the Righteousness of God is brought near; and, trusting in Him, each of us may tread in His footsteps, and have His Righteousness fulfilled in us "who walk, not after the flesh, but after the spirit."

PSALM LXXXVI.

1 Bow down Thine ear, Jehovah, answer me,
For I am afflicted and poor.
2 Keep my soul, for I am favoured [by Thee],
Save Thy servant, O Thou my God,
That trusts in Thee.
3 Be gracious to me, Lord,
For to Thee I cry all the day.
4 Rejoice the soul of Thy servant,
For to Thee, Lord, do I lift up my soul.
5 For Thou, Lord, art good and forgiving,
And plenteous in loving-kindness to all who call on Thee.

6 Give ear, Jehovah, to my prayer,
And take heed to the voice of my supplications.
7 In the day of my straits will I call [on] Thee,
For Thou wilt answer me.
8 There is none like Thee among the gods, O Lord,
And no [works] like Thy works.
9 All nations whom Thou hast made
Shall come and bow themselves before Thee,
And shall give glory to Thy Name.
10 For great art Thou and doest wonders,
Thou art God alone.
11 Teach me, Jehovah, Thy way,
I will walk in Thy troth,
Unite my heart to fear Thy Name.
12 I will thank Thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart,
And I will glorify Thy Name for ever.
13 For Thy loving-kindness is great towards me,
And Thou hast delivered my soul from Sheol beneath.

14 O God, the proud have risen against me,
And a crew of violent men have sought after my soul,
And have not set Thee before them.

15 But Thou, Lord, art a God compassionate and gracious,
Long-suffering and plenteous in loving-kindness and troth.
16 Turn to me and be gracious to me,
Give Thy strength to Thy servant,
And save the son of Thy handmaid.
17 Work for me a sign for good,
That they who hate me may see and be ashamed,
For Thou, Jehovah, hast helped me and comforted me.

THIS psalm is little more than a mosaic of quotations and familiar phrases of petition. But it is none the less individual, nor is the psalmist less heavily burdened, or less truly beseeching and trustful, because he casts his prayer into well-worn words. God does not give "originality" to every devout man; and He does not require it as a condition of accepted prayer. Humble souls, who find in more richly endowed men's words the best expression of their own needs, may be encouraged by such a psalm. Critics may think little of it, as a mere cento; but God does not refuse to bow His ear, though He is asked to do so in borrowed words. A prayer full of quotations may be heartfelt, and then it will be heard and answered. This psalmist has not only shown his intimate acquaintance with earlier devotional words, but he has woven his garland with much quiet beauty, and has blended its flowers into a harmony of colour all his own.

There is no fully developed strophical arrangement, but there is a discernible flow of thought, and the psalm may be regarded as falling into three parts.

The first of these (vv. 1–5) is a series of petitions, each supported by a plea. The petitions are the well-worn ones which spring from universal need, and there is a certain sequence in them. They begin with "Bow down Thine ear," the first of a suppliant's desires, which, as it were, clears the way for those which follow.

Trusting that he will not ask in vain, the psalmist then prays that God would "keep" his soul as a watchful guardian or sentry does, and that, as the result of such care, he may be saved from impending perils. Nor do his desires limit themselves to deliverance. They rise to more inward and select manifestations of God's heart of tenderness, for the prayer "Be gracious" asks for such, and so goes deeper into the blessedness of the devout life than the preceding. And the crown of all these requests is "Rejoice the soul of Thy servant," with the joy which flows from experience of outward deliverance and of inward whispers of God's grace, heard in the silent depths of communion with Him. It matters not that every petition has parallels in other psalms, which this singer is quoting. His desires are none the less his, because they have been shared by a company of devout souls before him. His expression of them is none the less his, because his very words have been uttered by others. There is rest in thus associating oneself with an innumerable multitude who have "cried to God and been lightened." The petition in ver. 1 is like that in Psalm lv. 2. Ver. 2 sounds like a reminiscence of Psalm xxv. 20; ver. 3 closely resembles Psalm lvii. 1.

The pleas on which the petitions are grounded are also beautifully wreathed together. First, the psalmist asks to be heard because he is afflicted and poor (compare Psalm xl. 17). Our need is a valid plea with a faithful God. The sense of it drives us to Him; and our recognition of poverty and want must underlie all faithful appeal to Him. The second plea is capable of two interpretations. The psalmist says that he is *Chasid*; and that word is by some commentators taken to mean *one who exercises*, and by others *one who is the*

subject of, Chesed—i.e., loving-kindness. As has been already remarked on Psalm iv. 3, the passive meaning —*i.e.*, one to whom God's loving-kindness is shown—is preferable. Here it is distinctly better than the other. The psalmist is not presenting his own character as a plea, but urging God's gracious relation to him, which, once entered on, pledges God to unchanging continuance in manifesting His loving-kindness. But, though the psalmist does not plead his character, he does, in the subsequent pleas, present his faith, his daily and day-long prayers, and his lifting of his desires, aspirations, and whole self above the trivialities of earth to set them on God. These are valid pleas with Him. It cannot be that trust fixed on Him should be disappointed, nor that cries perpetually rising to His ears should be unanswered, nor that a soul stretching its tendrils heavenward should fail to find the strong stay, round which it can cling and climb. God owns the force of such appeals, and delights to be moved to answer, by the spreading before Him of His servant's faith and longings.

But all the psalmist's other pleas are merged at last in that one contained in ver. 5, where he gazes on the revealed Name of God, and thinks of Him as He had been described of old, and as this suppliant delights to set to his seal that he has found Him to be—good and placable, and rich in loving-kindness. God is His own motive, and Faith can find nothing mightier to urge with God, nor any surer answer to its own doubts to urge with itself, than the unfolding of all that lies in the Name of the Lord. These pleas, like the petitions which they support, are largely echoes of older words. "Afflicted and poor" comes, as just noticed, from Psalm xl. 17. The designation of "one

whom God favours" is from Psalm iv. 3. "Unto Thee do I lift up my soul" is taken verbatim from Psalm xxv. 1. The explication of the contents of the Name of the Lord, like the fuller one in ver. 15, is based upon Exod. xxxiv. 6.

Vv. 6–13 may be taken together, as the prayer proper, to which vv. 1–5 are introductory. In them there is, first, a repetition of the cry for help, and of the declaration of need (vv. 6, 7); then a joyful contemplation of God's unapproachable majesty and works, which insure the ultimate recognition of His Name by all nations (vv. 8–10); then a profoundly and tenderly spiritual prayer for guidance and consecration—wants more pressing still than outward deliverance (ver. 11); and, finally, as in so many psalms, anticipatory thanksgivings for deliverance yet future, but conceived of as present by vivid faith.

Echoes of earlier psalms sound through the whole; but the general impression is not that of imitation, but of genuine personal need and devotion. Ver. 7 is like Psalm xvii. 6 and other passages; ver. 8*a* is from Exod. xv. 11; ver. 8*b* is modelled on Deut. iii. 24; ver. 9, on Psalm xxii. 27; ver. 11*a*, on Psalm xxvii. 11; ver. 11*b*, on Psalm xxvi. 3; "Sheol beneath" is from Deut. xxxii. 22. But, withal, there are unity and progress in this cento of citations. The psalmist begins with reiterating his cry that God would hear, and in ver. 7 advances to the assurance that He will. Then in vv. 8–10 he turns from all his other pleas to dwell on his final one (ver. 5) of the Divine character. As, in the former verse, he had rested his calm hope on God's willingness to help, so now he strengthens himself, in assurance of an answer, by the thought of God's unmatched power, the unique majesty of His works

and His sole Divinity. Ver. 8 might seem to assert only Jehovah's supremacy above other gods of the heathen; but ver. 10 shows that the psalmist speaks the language of pure Monotheism. Most naturally the prophetic assurance that all nations shall come and worship Him is deduced from His sovereign power and incomparableness. It cannot be that "the nations whom Thou hast made" shall for ever remain ignorant of the hand that made them. Sooner or later that great character shall be seen by all men in its solitary elevation; and universal praise shall correspond to His sole Divinity.

The thought of God's sovereign power carries the psalmist beyond remembrance of his immediate outward needs, and stirs higher desires in him. Hence spring the beautiful and spiritual petitions of ver. 11, which seek for clearer insight into God's will concerning the psalmist's conduct, breathe aspirations after a "walk" in that God-appointed way and in "Thy troth," and culminate in one of the sweetest and deepest prayers of the Psalter: "Unite my heart to fear Thy Name." There, at least, the psalmist speaks words borrowed from no other, but springing fresh from his heart's depths. Jer. xxxii. 39 is the nearest parallel, and the commandment in Deut. vi. 5, to love God "with all thine heart," may have been in the psalmist's mind; but the prayer is all his own. He has known the misery of a divided heart, the affections and purposes of which are drawn in manifold directions, and are arrayed in conflict against each other. There is no peace nor blessedness, neither is any nobility of life possible, without whole-hearted devotion to one great object; and there is no object capable of evoking such devotion or worthy to receive it, except Him who is "God alone."

Divided love is no love. It must be "all in all, or not at all." With deep truth, the command to love God with all the heart is based upon His Unity—"Hear, O Israel: The Lord thy God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart" (Deut. vi. 4). The very conception of religion requires that it should be exclusive, and should dominate the whole nature. It is only God who is great enough to fill and engage all our capacities. Only the mass of the central sun is weighty enough to make giant orbs its satellites, and to wheel them in their courses. There is no tranquillity nor any power in lives frittered away on a thousand petty loves. The river that breaks into a multitude of channels is sucked up in the sand without reaching the ocean, and has no force in its current to scour away obstructions. Concentration makes strong men; consecration makes saints. "This one thing I do" is the motto of all who have done anything worthy. "Unite my heart to fear Thy Name" is the prayer of all whose devotion is worthy of its object, and is the source of joy and power to themselves. The psalmist asks for a heart made one with itself in the fear of God, and then vows that, with that united heart, he will praise his delivering God. As in many other psalms, he anticipates the answers to his prayers, and in ver. 13 speaks of God's loving-kindness as freshly manifested to him, and of deliverance from the dismal depths of the unseen world, which threatened to swallow him up. It seems more in accordance with the usage in similar psalms to regard ver. 13 as thus recounting, with prophetic certainty, the coming deliverance as if it were accomplished, than to suppose that in it the psalmist is falling back on former instances of God's rescuing grace.

In the closing part (vv. 14–17), the psalmist describes more precisely his danger. He is surrounded by a rabble rout of proud and violent men, whose enmity to him is, as in so many of the psalms of persecuted singers, a proof of their forgetfulness of God. Right against this rapid outline of his perils, he sets the grand unfolding of the character of God in ver 15. It is still fuller than that in ver. 5, and, like it, rests on Exod xxxiv. Such juxtaposition is all that is needed to show how little he has to fear from the hostile crew. On one hand are they, in their insolence and masterfulness, eagerly hunting after his life; on the other is God with His infinite pity and loving-kindness. Happy are they who can discern high above dangers and foes the calm presence of the only God, and, with hearts undistracted and undismayed, can oppose to all that assails them the impenetrable shield of the Name of the Lord! It concerns our peaceful fronting of the darker facts of life, that we cultivate the habit of never looking at dangers or sorrows without seeing the helping God beside and above them.

The psalm ends with prayer for present help. If God is, as the psalmist has seen Him to be, "full of compassion and gracious," it is no presumptuous petition that the streams of these perfections should be made to flow towards a needy suppliant. "Be gracious to *me*" asks that the light, which pours through the universe, may fall on one heart, which is surrounded by earth-born darkness. As in the introductory verses, so in the closing petitions, the psalmist grounds his prayer principally on God's manifested character, and secondarily on his own relation to God. Thus in ver. 16 he pleads that he is God's servant, and "the son of Thy handmaid" (compare Psalm cxvi. 16). That express

sion does not imply any special piety in the psalmist's mother, but pleads his hereditary relation as servant to God, or, in other words, his belonging by birth to Israel, as a reason for his prayers being heard. His last petition for "a sign" does not necessarily mean a miracle, but a clear manifestation of God's favour, which might be as unmistakably shown by an every-day event as by a supernatural intervention. To the devout heart, all common things are from God, and bear witness for Him. Even blind eyes and hard hearts may be led to see and feel that God is the helper and comforter of humble souls who trust in Him. A heart that is made at peace with itself by the fear of God, and has but one dominant purpose and desire, will long for God's mercies, not only because they have a bearing on its own outward well-being, but because they will demonstrate that it is no vain thing to wait on the Lord, and may lead some, who cherished enmity to God's servant and alienation from Himself, to learn the sweetness of His Name and the security of trust in Him.

PSALM LXXXVII.

1 His foundation on the holy mountains,
2 The gates of Zion Jehovah loves
More than all the dwellings of Jacob.
3 Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. Selah.

4 I will proclaim Rahab and Babylon as those who know Me:
"Behold Philistia and Tyre, with Cush;
This one was born there."
5 And of Zion it shall be said,
"Man after man was born in her,"
And He, the Most High, shall establish her.
6 Jehovah shall reckon when He writes down the peoples,
"This one was born there." Selah.

7 And singers and dancers [shall chant],
"All my fountains are in Thee."

ONE clear note sounds in this remarkable psalm. Its single theme is the incorporation of ancestral foes and distant nations with the people of God. Aliens are to be enrolled as home-born citizens of Jerusalem. In modern words, the vision of a universal Church, a brotherhood of humanity, shines radiant before the seer. Other psalmists and prophets have like insight into the future expansion of the nation, but this psalm stands alone in the emphasis which it places upon the idea of birth into the rights of citizenship. This singer has had granted to him a glimpse of two great truths — the universality of the Church, and the mode of entrance into it by reception

of a new life. To what age of Israel he belonged is uncertain. The mention of Babylon as among the enemies who have become fellow-citizens favours the supposition of a post-exilic date, which is also supported by resemblances to Isa. xl.–lxvi.

The structure is simple. The psalm is divided by Selah into two strophes, to which a closing verse is appended. The first strophe bursts abruptly into rapturous praise of Zion, the beloved of God. The second predicts the gathering of all nations into her citizenship, and the closing verse apparently paints the exuberant joy of the festal crowds, who shall then throng her streets.

The abrupt beginning of the first strophe offends some commentators, who have tried to smooth ver. 1 into propriety and tameness, by suggesting possible preliminary clauses, which they suppose to have dropped out. But there is no canon which forbids a singer, with the rush of inspiration, either poetic or other, on him, to plunge into the heart of his theme. Ver. 1 may be construed, as in the A.V. and R.V (text), as a complete sentence, but is then somewhat feeble. It is better to connect it with ver. 2, and to regard "His foundation upon the holy mountains" as parallel with "the gates of Zion," and as, like that phrase, dependent on the verb "loves." Hupfeld, indeed, proposes to transfer "Jehovah loves" from the beginning of ver. 2, where it now stands, to the end of ver. 1, supplying the verb mentally in the second clause. He thus gets a complete parallelism :—

> **His foundation upon the holy mountains Jehovah loves,**
> **The gates of Zion before all the dwellings of Jacob.**

But this is not necessary; for the verb may as well

be supplied to the first as to the second clause. The harshness of saying "His foundation," without designating the person to whom the pronoun refers, which is extreme if ver. 1 is taken as a separate sentence, is diminished when it is regarded as connected with ver. 2, in which the mention of Jehovah leaves no doubt as to whose the "foundation" is. The psalmist's fervent love for Jerusalem is something more than national pride. It is the apotheosis of that emotion, clarified and hallowed into religion. Zion is founded by God Himself. The mountains on which it stands are made holy by the Divine dwelling. On their heads shines a glory before which the light that lies on the rock crowned by the Parthenon or on the seven hills of Rome pales. Not only the Temple mountain is meant, but the city is the psalmist's theme. The hills, on which it stands, are emblems of the firmness of its foundation in the Divine purpose, on which it reposes. It is beloved of God, and that, as the form of the word "loves" shows, with an abiding affection. The "glorious things" which are spoken of Zion may be either the immediately following Divine oracle, or, more probably, prophetic utterances such as many of those in Isaiah, which predict its future glory. The Divine utterance which follows expresses the substance of these. So far, the psalm is not unlike other outpourings in praise of Zion, such as Psalm xlviii. But, in the second strophe, to which the first is introductory, the singer strikes a note all his own.

There can be no doubt as to who is the speaker in ver. 4. The abrupt introduction of a Divine Oracle accords with a not infrequent usage in the Psalter, which adds much to the solemnity of the words. If we regard the "glorious things" mentioned in ver. 3

as being the utterances of earlier prophets, the psalmist has had his ears purged to hear God's voice, by meditation on and sympathy with these The faithful use of what God has said prepares for hearing further disclosures of His lips. The enumeration of nations in ver. 4 carries a great lesson. First comes the ancient enemy, Egypt, designated by the old name of contempt (Rahab, *i.e.* pride), but from which the contempt has faded ; then follows Babylon, the more recent inflicter of many miseries, once so detested, but towards whom animosity has died down. These two, as the chief oppressors, between whom, like a piece of metal between hammer and anvil, Israel's territory lay, are named first, with the astonishing declaration that God will proclaim them as among those who know Him. That knowledge, of course, is not merely intellectual, but the deeper knowledge of personal acquaintance or friendship—a knowledge of which love is an element, and which is vital and transforming. Philistia is the old neighbour and foe, which from the beginning had hung on the skirts of Israel, and been ever ready to utilise her disasters and add to them. Tyre is the type of godless luxury and inflated material prosperity, and, though often in friendly alliance with Israel, as being exposed to the same foes which harassed her, she was as far from knowing God as the other nations were. Cush, or Ethiopia, seems mentioned as a type of distant peoples, rather than because of its hostility to Israel. God points to these nations—some of them near, some remote, some powerful and some feeble, some hereditarily hostile and some more or less amicable with Israel—and gives forth the declaration concerning them, "This one was born there."

God's voice ceases, and in ver. 5 the psalmist takes

up the wonderful promise which he has just heard. He slightly shifts his point of view: for while the nations that were to be gathered into Zion were the foremost figures in the Divine utterance, the Zion into which they are gathered is foremost in the psalmist's, in ver. 5. Its glory, when thus enriched by a multitude of new citizens, bulks in his eyes more largely than their blessedness. Another shade of difference between the two verses is that, in the former, the ingathering of the peoples is set forth as collective or national incorporation, and, in the latter,—as the expression "man after (or *by*) man" suggests,—individual accession is more clearly foretold. The establishment of Zion, which the psalmist prophesies, is the result of her reinforcement by these new citizens. The grand figure of ver. 6 pictures God as taking a census of the whole world; for it is "the peoples" whom He numbers As he writes down each name, He says concerning it, "This one was born there." That list of citizens is "the Book of the Living." So "the end of all history is that Zion becomes the metropolis of all people" (Delitzsch).

Three great truths had dawned on this psalmist, though their full light was reserved for the Christian era. He had been led to apprehend that the Jewish Church would expand into a world-wide community. If one thinks of the gulfs of hatred and incompatibility which parted the peoples in his day, his clear utterance of that great truth, the apprehension of which so far transcended his time, and the realisation of which so far transcends ours, will surely be seen to be due to a Divine breath. The broadest New Testament expression of Universalism does not surpass the psalmist's confident certainty. "There is neither Greek nor Jew,

barbarian, Scythian," says no more than he said. More remarkable still is his conception of the method by which the nations should be gathered in to Zion. They are to be "born there." Surely there shines before the speaker some glimmering ray of the truth that incorporation with the people of God is effected by the communication of a new life, a transformation of the natural, which will set men in new affinities, and make them all brethren, because all participant of the same wondrous birth. It would be anachronism to read into the psalm the clear Christian truth "Ye must be born again," but it would be as false a weakening of its words to refuse to see in them the germ of that truth. The third discovery which the psalmist has made, or rather the third revelation which he has received, is that of the individual accession of the members of the outlying nations. The Divine voice, in ver. 4, seems to speak of birth into citizenship as national; but the psalmist, in ver. 6, represents Jehovah as writing the names of individuals in the burgess-roll, and of saying in regard to each, as He writes, "This one was born there." In like manner, in ver. 5, the form of expression is "Man after man," which brings out the same thought, with the addition that there is an unbroken series of new citizens. It is by accession of single souls that the population of Zion is increased. God's register resolves the community into its component units. Men are born one by one, and one by one they enter the true kingdom. In the ancient world the community was more than the individual. But in Christ the individual acquires new worth, while the bands of social order are not thereby weakened, but made more stringent and sacred. The city, whose inhabitants have one by one been won by its King, and

have been knit to Him in the sacred depths of personal being, is more closely "compact together" than the mechanical aggregations which call themselves civil societies. The unity of Christ's kingdom does not destroy national characteristics any more than it interferes with individual idiosyncrasies. The more each constituent member is himself, the more will he be joined to others, and contribute his special mite to the general wealth and well-being.

Ver. 7 is, on any interpretation, extremely obscure, because so abrupt and condensed. But probably the translation adopted above, though by no means free from difficulty or doubt, brings out the meaning which is most in accordance with the preceding. It may be supposed to flash vividly before the reader's imagination the picture of a triumphal procession of rejoicing citizens, singers as well as dancers, who chant, as they advance, a joyous chorus in praise of the city, in which they have found all fountains of joy and satisfaction welling up for their refreshment and delight.

PSALM LXXXVIII.

1 Jehovah, God of my salvation,
By day, by night I cry before Thee.
2 Let my prayer come before Thy face,
Bow Thine ear to my shrill cry.
3 For sated with troubles is my soul,
And my life has drawn near to Sheol.
4 I am counted with those that have gone down to the pit,
I am become as a man without strength.
5 [I am] free among the dead,
Like the slain that lie in the grave,
Whom Thou remembrest no more,
But they are cut off from Thy hand.
6 Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit,
In dark places, in the deeps.
7 Upon me Thy wrath presses hard,
And [with] all Thy breakers Thou hast afflicted [me]. Selah.
8 Thou hast put my familiar friends far from me,
Thou hast made me an abomination to them,
I am shut up so that I cannot come forth.

9 My eye wastes away because of affliction,
I have called on Thee daily, Jehovah,
I have spread out my palms to Thee.
10 For the dead canst Thou do wonders?
Or can the shades arise [and] praise Thee? Selah.
11 In the grave can Thy loving kindness be told,
And Thy faithfulness in destruction?
12 Can Thy wonders be made known in darkness,
And Thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

13 But I, I have cried unto Thee, Jehovah,
And in the morning my prayer comes to meet Thee.
14 Why, Jehovah, dost Thou cast off my soul,
[And] hidest Thy face from me?

15 Afflicted am I and at the point of death from [my] youth,
I have borne Thy terrors [till] I am distracted.
16 Over me have Thy [streams of] wrath passed,
Thy horrors have cut me off.
17 They have compassed me about like waters all the day,
They have come round me together.
18 Thou hast put far from me lover and friend,
My familiar friends are—darkness.

A PSALM which begins with "God of my salvation" and ends with "darkness" is an anomaly. All but unbroken gloom broods over it, and is densest at its close. The psalmist is so "weighed upon by sore distress," that he has neither definite petition for deliverance nor hope. His cry to God is only a long-drawn complaint, which brings no respite from his pains nor brightening of his spirit. But yet to address God as the God of his salvation, to discern His hand in the infliction of sorrows, is the operation of true though feeble faith. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," is the very spirit of this psalm. It stands alone in the Psalter, which would be incomplete as a mirror of phases of devout experience, unless it had one psalm expressing trust which has ceased to ask or hope for the removal of life-long griefs, but still clasps God's hand even in the "darkness." Such experience is comparatively rare, and is meant to be risen above. Therefore this psalm stands alone. But it is not unexampled, and all moods of the devout life would not find lyrical expression in the book unless this deep note was once sounded.

It is useless to inquire what was the psalmist's affliction. His language seems to point to physical disease, of long continuance and ever threatening a fatal termination; but in all probability sickness is a

symbol here, as so often. What racked his sensitive spirit matters little. The cry which his pains evoked is what we are concerned with. There is little trace of strophical arrangement, and commentators differ much in their disposition of the parts of the psalm. But we venture to suggest a principle of division which has not been observed, in the threefold recurrence of "I cry" or "I call," accompanied in each case by direct address to Jehovah. The resulting division into three parts gives, first, the psalmist's description of his hopeless condition as, in effect, already dead (vv. 1–8); second, an expostulation with God on the ground that, if the psalmist is actually numbered with the dead, he can no more be the object of Divine help, nor bring God praise (vv. 9–12); and, third, a repetition of the thoughts of the first part, with slight variation and addition.

The central portion of the first division is occupied with an expansion of the thought that the psalmist is already as good as dead (vv. 3 *b*–6). The condition of the dead is drawn with a powerful hand, and the picture is full of solemn grandeur and hopelessness. It is preceded in vv. 1, 2, by an invocation which has many parallels in the psalms, but which here is peculiarly striking. This saddest of them all has for its first words the Name which ought to banish sadness. He who can call on Jehovah as the God of his salvation possesses a charm which has power to still agitation, and to flush despair with some light of hope as from an unrisen sun. But this poet feels no warmth from the beams, and the mists surge up, if not to hide the light, yet to obscure it. All the more admirable, then, the persistence of his cry; and all the more precious the lesson that Faith is not to let present

experience limit its conceptions. God is none the less the God of salvation and none the less to be believed to be so, though no consciousness of His saving power blesses the heart at the moment.

Ver. 1 *b* is obscure. Psalm xxii. 2 and other places suggest that the juxtaposition of day and night is meant to express the continuity of the psalmist's prayer; but, as the text now stands, the first part of the clause can only mean "In the time (day) when I cry," and the second has to be supplemented so as to read "[My cry comes] before Thee." This gives a poor meaning, and there is probability in the slight emendation on the word for *day*, which is required in order to make it an adverb of time equivalent to "In the day," as in the passage already quoted. Another emendation, adopted by Graetz, Bickell, and Cheyne, changes "God of" into "my God," and "my salvation" into "I cry" (the same word as in ver. 13), and attaches "by day" to the first clause. The result is,—

> Jehovah, my God, I cry to Thee **by day,**
> I call in the night before Thee.

The changes are very slight and easy, and the effect of them is satisfactory. The meaning of the verse is obvious, whether the emendation is accepted or not. The gain from the proposed change is dearly purchased by the loss of that solitary expression of hope in the name of "God of my salvation," the one star which gleams for a moment through a rift in the blackness.

With "For" in ver. 3 the psalmist begins the dreary description of his affliction, the desperate and all but deodly character of which he spreads before God as a reason for hearing his prayer. Despair sometimes strikes men dumb, and sometimes makes them eloquent. The sorrow which has a voice is less crushing than

that which is tongueless. This overcharged heart finds relief in self-pitying depicting of its burdens, and in the exercise of a gloomy imagination, which draws out in detail the picture of the feebleness, the recumbent stillness, the seclusion and darkness of the dead. They have "no strength." Their vital force has ebbed away, and they are but as weak shadows, having an impotent existence, which does not deserve to be called life. The remarkable expression of ver. 5, "free among the dead," is to be interpreted in the light of Job iii. 19, which counts it as one blessing of the grave, that "there the servant is free from his master." But the psalmist thinks that that "freedom" is loathsome, not desirable, for it means removal from the stir of a life, the heaviest duties and cares of which are better than the torpid immunity from these, which makes the state of the dead a dreary monotony. They lie stretched out and motionless. No ripple of cheerful activity stirs that stagnant sea. One unvarying attitude is theirs. It is not the stillness of rest which prepares for work, but of incapacity of action or of change. They are forgotten by Him who remembers all that are. They are parted from the guiding and blessing influence of the Hand that upholds all being. In some strange fashion they are and yet are not. Their death has a simulacrum of life. Their shadowy life is death. Being and non-being may both be predicated of them. The psalmist speaks in riddles; and the contradictions in his speech reflect his dim knowledge of that place of darkness. He looks into its gloomy depths, and he sees little but gloom. It needed the resurrection of Jesus to flood these depths with light, and to show that the life beyond may be fuller of bright activity than life here—a state in which vital strength is increased

beyond all earthly experience, and wherein God's all-quickening hand grasps more closely, and communicates richer gifts than are attainable in that death which sense calls life.

Ver. 7 traces the psalmist's sorrows to God. It breathes not complaint but submission, or, at least, recognition of His hand; and they who, in the very paroxysm of their pains, can say, "It is the Lord," are not far from saying, "Let Him do what seemeth Him good," nor from the peace that comes from a compliant will. The recognition implies, too, consciousness of sin which has deserved the "wrath" of God, and in such consciousness lies the germ of blessing. Sensitive nerves may quiver, as they feel the dreadful weight with which that wrath presses down on them, as if to crush them; but if the man lies still, and lets the pressure do its work, it will not force out his life, but only his evil, as foul water is squeezed from cloth. Ver. 7*b* is rendered by Delitzsch "All Thy billows Thou pressest down," which gives a vivid picture; but "billows" is scarcely the word to use for the downward rushing waters of a cataract, and the ordinary rendering, adopted above, requires only natural supplements.

Ver. 8 approaches nearer to a specification of the psalmist's affliction. If taken literally, it points to some loathsome disease, which had long clung to him, and made even his friends shrink from companionship, and thus had condemned him to isolation. All these details suggest leprosy, which, if referred to here, is most probably to be taken, as sickness is in several psalms, as symbolic of affliction. The desertion by friends is a common feature in the psalmists' complaints. The seclusion as in a prison-house is, no doubt, appropriate to the leper's condition, but may

also simply refer to the loneliness and compulsory inaction arising from heavy trials. At all events, the psalmist is flung back friendless on himself, and hemmed in, so that he cannot expatiate in the joyous bustle of life. Blessed are they who, when thus situated, can betake themselves to God, and find that He does not turn away! The consciousness of His loving presence has not yet lighted the psalmist's soul; but the clear acknowledgment that it is God who has put the sweetness of earthly companionship beyond his reach is, at least, the beginning of the happier experience, that God never makes a solitude round a soul without desiring to fill it with Himself.

If the recurring cry to Jehovah in ver. 9 is taken, as we have suggested it should be, as marking a new turn in the thoughts, the second part of the psalm will include vv. 9–12. Vv. 10–12 are apparently the daily prayer referred to in ver. 9. They appeal to God to preserve the psalmist from the state of death, which he has just depicted himself as having in effect already entered, by the consideration which is urged in other psalms as a reason for Divine intervention (vi. 5, xxx. 9, etc.)—namely, that His power had no field for its manifestation in the grave, and that He could draw no revenue of praise from the pale lips that lay silent there. The conception of the state of the dead is even more dreary than that in vv. 4, 5. They are "shades," which word conveys the idea of relaxed feebleness. Their dwelling is Abaddon—*i.e.*, "destruction,"—"darkness," "the land of forgetfulness" whose inhabitants remember not, nor are remembered, either by God or man. In that cheerless region, God had no opportunity to show His wonders of delivering mercy, for monotonous immobility was stamped upon it, and

out of that realm of silence no glad songs of praise could sound. Such thoughts are in startling contrast with the hopes that sparkle in some psalms (such as xvi. 10, etc.), and they show that clear, permanent assurance of future blessedness was not granted to the ancient Church. Nor could there be sober certainty of it until after Christ's resurrection. But it is also to be noticed that this psalm neither affirms nor denies a future resurrection. It does affirm continuous personal existence after death, of however thin and shadowy a sort. It is not concerned with what may lie far ahead, but is speaking of the present state of the dead, as it was conceived of, at the then stage of revelation, by a devout soul, in its hours of despondency.

The last part (vv. 13–18) is marked, like the two preceding, by the repetition of the name of Jehovah, and of the allusion to the psalmist's continual prayer. It is remarkable, and perhaps significant, that the time of prayer should here be "the morning," whereas in ver. 1 it was, according to Delitzsch, *the night*, or, according to the other rendering, *day and night*. The psalmist had asked in ver. 2 that his prayer might enter into God's presence; he now vows that it will come to meet Him. Possibly some lightening of his burden may be hinted at by the reference to the time of his petition. Morning is the hour of hope, of new vigour, of a fresh beginning, which may not be only a prolongation of dreary yesterdays. But if there is any such alleviation, it is only for a moment, and then the cloud settles down still more heavily. But one thing the psalmist has won by his cry. He now longs to know the reason for his affliction. He is confident that God is righteous when He afflicts, and, heavy as his sorrow is, he has passed beyond mere complaint con-

cerning it, to the wish to understand it. The consciousness that it is chastisement, occasioned by his own evil, and meant to purge that evil away, is present, in a rudimentary form at least, in that cry, "*Why* castest Thou off my soul?" If sorrow has brought a man to offer that prayer, it has done its work, and will cease before long, or, if it lasts, will be easier to bear, when its meaning and purpose are clear. But the psalmist rises to such a height but for a moment, though his momentary attaining it gives promise that he will, by degrees, be able to remain there permanently. It is significant that the only direct naming of Jehovah, in addition to the three which accompany the references to his prayers, is associated with this petition for enlightenment. The singer presses close to God in his faith that His hardest blows are not struck at random, and that His administration has for its basis, not caprice, but reason, moved by love and righteousness.

Such a cry is never offered in vain, even though it should be followed, as it is here, by plaintive reiterations of the sufferer's pains. These are now little more than a summary of the first part. The same idea of being in effect dead even while alive is repeated in ver. 15, in which the psalmist wails that from youth he had been but a dying man, so close to him had death seemed, or so death-like had been his life. He has borne God's terrors till he is distracted. The word rendered "I am distracted" is only used here, and consequently is obscure. Hupfeld and others deny that it is a word at all (he calls it an "Unwort"), and would read another which means *to become torpid.* The existing text is defended by Delitzsch and others, who take the word to mean to be weakened in mind or

bewildered. The meaning of the whole seems to be as rendered above. But it might also be translated, as by Cheyne, "I bear Thy terrors, my senses must fail." In ver. 16 the word for wrath is in the plural, to express the manifold outbursts of that deadly indignation. The word means literally heat; and we may represent the psalmist's thought as being that the wrath shoots forth many fierce tongues of licking flame, or, like a lava stream, pours out in many branches. The word rendered "Cut me off" is anomalous, and is variously translated *annihilate*, *extinguish*, or as above. The wrath which was a fiery flame in ver. 16 is an overwhelming flood in ver. 17. The complaint of ver. 8 recurs in ver. 18, in still more tragic form. All human sympathy and help are far away, and the psalmist's only familiar friend is—darkness. There is an infinitude of despair in that sad irony. But there is a gleam of hope, though faint and far, like faint daylight seen from the innermost recesses of a dark tunnel, in his recognition that his dismal solitude is the work of God's hand; for, if God has made a heart or a life empty of human love, it is that He may Himself fill it with His own sweet and all-compensating presence.

PSALM LXXXIX

1 The loving-kindnesses of Jehovah will I sing for ever,
To generation after generation will I make known Thy Faithfulness with my mouth.
2 For I said, For ever shall Loving-kindness be built up,
The heavens—in them wilt Thou establish Thy Faithfulness,

3 I have made a covenant with My chosen one,
I have sworn to David My servant;
4 For ever will I establish thy seed,
And build up thy throne to generation after generation. Selah.

5 And the heavens shall make known Thy wonders, Jehovah,
Thy Faithfulness also in the congregation of Thy holy ones.
6 For who in the skies can be set beside Jehovah,
[Or] likened to Jehovah, amongst the sons of the mighty ones?

7 A God very terrible in the council of the holy ones,
And dread above all round about Him.
8 Jehovah, God of Hosts, who like Thee is mighty, Jah?
And Thy Faithfulness [is] round Thee.

9 Thou, Thou rulest the insolence of the sea,
When its waves lift themselves on high, Thou, Thou stillest them.
10 Thou, Thou hast crushed Rahab as one that is slain,
By the arm of Thy strength Thou hast scattered Thine enemies.

11 Thine are the heavens, Thine also the earth,
The world and its fulness, Thou, Thou hast founded them.
12 North and south, Thou, Thou hast created them,
Tabor and Hermon shout for joy at Thy Name.

13 Thine is an arm with might,
Strong is Thy hand, high is Thy right hand.

14 Righteousness and Justice are the foundation of Thy throne,
Loving-kindness and Troth go to meet Thy face.

15 Blessed the people who know the festal shout!
Jehovah, in the light of Thy face they walk.
16 In Thy Name do they exult all the day,
And in Thy righteousness are they exalted.

17 For the glory of their strength art Thou,
And in Thy favour shall our horn be exalted.
18 For to Jehovah [belongs] our shield,
And to the Holy One of Israel our king.

19 Then Thou didst speak in vision to Thy favoured one and didst say,
I have laid help upon a hero,
I have exalted one chosen from the people,
20 I have found David My servant,
With My holy oil have I anointed him.

21 With whom My hand shall be continually,
Mine arm shall also strengthen him,
22 No enemy shall steal upon him,
And no son of wickedness shall afflict him.

23 And I shatter his adversaries before him,
And them that hate him will I smite,
24 And My Faithfulness and My Loving-kindness [shall be] with him,
And in My name shall his horn be exalted.
25 And I will set his hand on the sea,
And his right hand on the rivers.

26 He, he shall call upon Me, My Father art Thou,
My God and the rock of my salvation.
27 Also I, I will give him [to be My] first-born,
Higher than the kings of the earth.

28 For ever will I keep for him My Loving-kindness,
And My covenant shall be inviolable towards him.
29 And I will make his seed [to last] for ever,
And his throne as the days of heaven.

30 If his sons forsake My law,
And walk not in My judgments,
31 If they profane My statutes,
And keep not My commandments,

32 Then will I visit their transgression with a rod,
And their iniquity with stripes.
33 But My Loving-kindness will I not break off from him,
And I will not be false to My Faithfulness.

34 I will not profane My covenant,
And that which has gone forth from My lips will I not change.
35 Once have I sworn by My holiness,
Verily I will not be false to David.

36 His seed shall be for ever,
And his throne as the sun before me,
37 As the moon shall he be established for ever,
And the witness in the sky is true. Selah.

38 But Thou, Thou hast cast off and rejected,
Thou hast been wroth with Thine anointed,
39 Thou hast abhorred the covenant of Thy servant,
Thou hast profaned his crown to the ground.

40 Thou hast broken down all his fences,
Thou hast made his strongholds a ruin.
41 All that pass on the way spoil him,
He is become a reproach to his neighbours.

42 Thou hast exalted the hand of his adversaries,
Thou hast made all his enemies rejoice.
43 Also Thou turnest the edge of his sword,
And hast not made him to stand in the battle.

44 Thou hast made an end of his lustre,
And cast his throne to the ground,
45 Thou hast shortened the days of his youth,
Thou hast wrapped shame upon him. Selah.

46 How long, Jehovah, wilt Thou hide Thyself for ever?
[How long] shall Thy wrath burn like fire?
47 Remember how short a time I [have to live],
For what vanity hast Thou created all the sons of men!
48 Who is the man who shall live and not see death,
[Who] shall deliver his soul from the hand of Sheol?

49 Where are Thy former loving-kindnesses, Jehovah,
Which Thou swarest to David in Thy faithfulness?
50 Remember, Lord, the reproach of Thy servants,
How I bear in my bosom the shame of the peoples (?)

51 Wherewith Thine enemies have reproached Thee, Jehovah,
Wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of Thine anointed.

52 Blessed be Jehovah for evermore.
Amen and Amen.

THE foundation of this psalm is the promise in 2 Sam. vii. which guaranteed the perpetuity of the Davidic kingdom. Many of the characteristic phrases of the prophecy recur here—*e.g.*, the promises that the children of wickedness shall not afflict, and that the transgressions of David's descendants should be followed by chastisement only, not by rejection. The contents of Nathan's oracle are first given in brief in vv. 3, 4—"like a text," as Hupfeld says—and again in detail and with poetic embellishments in vv. 19–37. But these glorious promises are set in sharpest contrast with a doleful present, which seems to contradict them. They not only embitter it, but they bewilder faith, and the psalmist's lament is made almost a reproach of God, whose faithfulness seems imperilled by the disasters which had fallen on the monarchy and on Israel. The complaint and petitions of the latter part are the true burden of the psalm, to which the celebration of Divine attributes in vv. 1–18, and the expansion of the fundamental promise in vv. 19–37, are meant to lead up. The attributes specified are those of Faithfulness (vv. 1, 2, 5, 8, 14) and of Power, which render the fulfilment of God's promises certain. By such contemplations the psalmist would fortify himself against the whispers of doubt, which were beginning to make themselves heard in his mind, and would find in the character of God both assurance that His promise shall not fail, and a powerful plea for his prayer that it may not fail.

The whole tone of the psalm suggests that it was written when the kingdom was toppling to ruin, or perhaps even after its fall. Delitzsch improbably supposes that the young king, whom loss and shame make an old man (ver. 45), is Rehoboam, and that the disasters which gave occasion to the psalm were those inflicted by the Egyptian king Shishak. Others see in that youthful prince Jehoiachin, who reigned for three months, and was then deposed by Nebuchadnezzar, and whom Jeremiah has bewailed (xxii. 24–29). But all such conjectures are precarious.

The structure of the psalm can scarcely be called strophical. There are three well-marked turns in the flow of thought,—first, the hymn to the Divine attributes (vv. 1–18); second, the expansion of the promise, which is the basis of the monarchy (vv. 19–37); and, finally, the lament and prayer, in view of present afflictions, that God would be true to His attributes and promises (vv. 38–51). For the most part the verses are grouped in pairs, which are occasionally lengthened into triplets.

The psalmist begins with announcing the theme of his song—the Loving-kindness and Faithfulness of God. Surrounded by disasters, which seem in violent contradiction to God's promise to David, he falls back on thoughts of the Mercy which gave it and the Faithfulness which will surely accomplish it. The resolve to celebrate these in such circumstances argues a faith victorious over doubts, and putting forth energetic efforts to maintain itself. This bird can sing in midwinter. True, the song has other notes than joyous ones, but they, too, extol God's Loving-kindness and Faithfulness, even while they seem to question them.

Self-command, which insists on a man's averting his thoughts from a gloomy outward present to gaze on God's loving purpose and unalterable veracity, is no small part of practical religion. The psalmist will *sing*, because he *said* that these two attributes were ever in operation, and lasting as the heavens. "Loving-kindness shall be built up for ever," its various manifestations being conceived as each being a stone in the stately building which is in continual course of progress through all ages, and can never be completed, since fresh stones will continually be laid, as long as God lives and pours forth His blessings. Much less can it ever fall into ruin, as impatient sense would persuade the psalmist that it is doing in his day. The parallel declaration as to God's Faithfulness takes the heavens as the type of duration and immobility, and conceives that attribute to be eternal and fixed, as they are. These convictions could not burn in the psalmist's heart without forcing him to speak. Lover, poet, and devout man, in their several ways, feel the same necessity of utterance. Not every Christian can "sing," but all can and should speak. They will, if their faith is strong.

The Divine promise, on which the Davidic throne rests, is summed up in the abruptly introduced pair of verses (3, 4). That promise is the second theme of the psalm; and just as, in some great musical composition, the overture sounds for the first time phrases which are to be recurrent and elaborated in the sequel, so, in the four first verses of the psalm, its ruling thoughts are briefly put. Vv. 1, 2, stand first, but are second in time to vv. 3, 4. God's oracle preceded the singer's praise. The language of these two verses echoes the original passage in 2 Sam. vii., as in

"*David My servant, establish, for ever, build,*" the last three of which expressions were used in ver. 2, with a view to their recurrence in ver. 4. The music keeps before the mind the perpetual duration of David's throne.

In vv. 6–18 the psalmist sets forth the Power and Faithfulness of God, which insure the fulfilment of His promises. He is the incomparably great and terrible God, who subdues the mightiest forces of nature and tames the proudest nations (vv. 9, 10), who is Maker and Lord of the world (vv. 11, 12), who rules with power, but also with righteousness, faithfulness, and grace (vv. 13, 14), and who, therefore, makes His people blessed and safe (vv. 15–18). Since God is such a God, His promise cannot remain unfulfilled. Power and willingness to execute it to the last tittle are witnessed by heaven and earth, by history and experience. Dark as the present may be, it would, therefore, be folly to doubt for a moment.

The psalmist begins his contemplations of the glory of the Divine nature with figuring the very heavens as vocal with His praise. Not only the object but the givers of that praise are noteworthy. The heavens are personified, as in Psalm xix.; and from their silent depths comes music. There is One higher, mightier, older, more unperturbed, pure, and enduring than they, whom they extol by their lustre which they owe to Him. They praise God's "wonder" (which here means, not so much His marvellous acts, as the wonderfulness of His Being, His incomparable greatness and power), and His Faithfulness, the two guarantees of the fulfilment of His promises. Nor are the visible heavens His only praisers. The holy ones, sons of the mighty—*i.e.*, the angels—bow before Him

who is high above their holiness and might, and own Him for God alone.

With ver. 9 the hymn descends to earth, and magnifies God's Power and Faithfulness as manifested there. The sea is, as always, the emblem of rebellious tumult. Its insolence is calmed by Him. And the proudest of the nations, such as Rahab ("Pride," a current name for Egypt), had cause to own His power, when He brought the waves of the sea over her hosts, thus in one act exemplifying His sovereign sway over both nature and nations. He is Maker, and therefore Lord, of heaven and earth. In all quarters of the world His creative hand is manifest, and His praise sounds. Tabor and Hermon may stand, as the parallelism requires, for west and east, though some suppose that they are simply named as conspicuous summits. They "shout for joy at Thy Name," an expression like that used in ver. 16, in reference to Israel. The poet thinks of the softly swelling Tabor with its verdure, and of the lofty Hermon with its snows, as sharing in that gladness, and praising Him to whom they owe their beauty and majesty. Creation vibrates with the same emotions which thrill the poet. The sum of all the preceding is gathered up in ver. 13, which magnifies the might of God's arm.

But more blessed still for the psalmist, in the midst of national gloom, is the other thought of the moral character of God's rule. His throne is broad-based upon the sure foundation of righteousness and justice. The pair of attributes always closely connected—namely, Loving-kindness and Troth or Faithfulness—are here, as frequently, personified. They "go to meet Thy face"—that is, in order to present themselves before Him. "The two genii of the history of redemp-

tion (Psalm xliii. 3) stand before His countenance, like attendant maidens, waiting the slightest indication of His will" (Delitzsch).

Since God is such a God, His Israel is blessed, whatever its present plight. So the psalmist closes the first part of his song, with rapturous celebration of the favoured nation's prerogatives. "The festal shout" or "the trumpet-blast" is probably the music at the festivals (Numb. xxiii. 21 and xxxi. 6), and "those who know" it means "those who are familiar with the worship of this great God." The elements of their blessedness are then unfolded. "They walk in the light of Thy face." Their outward life is passed in continual happy consciousness of the Divine presence, which becomes to them a source of gladness and guidance. "In Thy Name do they exult all the day." God's self-manifestation, and the knowledge of Him which arises therefrom, become the occasion of a calm, perpetual joy, which is secure from change, because its roots go deeper than the region where change works. "In Thy righteousness shall they be exalted." Through God's strict adherence to His covenant, not by any power of their own, shall they be lifted above foes and fears. "The glory of their strength art Thou." In themselves they are weak, but Thou, not any arm of flesh, art their strength, and by possession of Thee they are not only clothed with might, but resplendent with beauty. Human power is often unlovely; God-given strength is, like armour inlaid with gold, ornament as well as defence. "In Thy favour our horn shall be exalted." The psalmist identifies himself at last with the people, whose blessedness he has so glowingly celebrated. He could keep up the appearance of distinction no longer. "They"

gives place to "we" unconsciously, as his heart swells with the joy which he paints. Depressed as he and his people are for the moment, he is sure that there is lifting up. The emblem of the lifted horn is common, as expressive of victory. The psalmist is confident of Israel's triumph, because he is certain that the nation, as represented by and, as it were, concentrated in its king, belongs to God, who will not lose what is His. The rendering of ver. 18 in the A.V. cannot be sustained. "Our shield" in the first clause is parallel with "our king" in the second, and the meaning of both clauses is that the king of Israel is God's, and therefore secure. That ownership rests on the promise to David, and on it in turn is rested the psalmist's confidence that Israel and its king are possessed of a charmed life, and shall be exalted, however now abject and despondent.

The second part (vv. 19–37) draws out in detail, and at some points with heightened colouring, the fundamental prophecy by Nathan. It falls into two parts, of which the former (vv. 19–27) refers more especially to the promises given to David, and the second (vv. 28–37) to those relating to his descendants. In ver. 19 "vision" is quoted from 2 Sam. vii. 17; "then" points back to the period of giving the promise; "Thy favoured one" is possibly Nathan, but more probably David. The Masoretic reading, however, which is followed by many ancient versions, has the plural "favoured ones," which Delitzsch takes to mean Samuel and Nathan. "Help" means the help which, through the king, comes to his people, and especially, as appears from the use of the word "hero," aid in battle. But since the selection of David for the throne is the subject in hand, the emendation which reads for "help" *crown*

recommends itself as probable. David's prowess, his humble origin, and his devotion to God's service are brought into view in vv. 19, 20, as explaining and magnifying the Divine choice. His dignity is all from God. Consequently, as the next pair of verses goes on to say, God's protecting hand will ever be with him, since He cannot set a man in any position and fail to supply the gifts needed for it. Whom He chooses He will protect. Sheltered behind that strong hand, the king will be safe from all assaults. The word rendered "steal upon" in ver. 22 is doubtful, and by some is taken to mean *to exact*, as a creditor does, but that gives a flat and incongruous turn to the promise. For ver. 22 *b* compare 2 Sam. vii. 10. Victory over all enemies is next promised in vv. 23–25, and is traced to the perpetual presence with the king of God's Faithfulness and Loving-kindness, the two attributes of which so much has been sung in the former part. The manifestation of God's character (*i.e.*, His Name) will secure the exaltation of David's horn—*i.e.*, the victorious exercise of his God-given strength. Therefore a wide extension of his kingdom is promised in ver. 25, from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates and its canals, on which God will lay the king's hand —*i.e.*, will put them in his possession.

The next pair of verses (26, 27) deals with the inward side of the relations of God and the king. On David's part there will be child-like love, with all the lowliness of trust and obedience which lies in the recognition of God's fatherhood, and on God's part there will be the acknowledgment of the relation, and the adoption of the king as His "first-born," and therefore, in a special sense, beloved and exalted. Israel is called by the same name in other places, in reference

to its special prerogative amongst the nations. The national dignity is concentrated in the king, who stands to other monarchs as Israel to other nations, and is to them "Most High," the august Divine title, which here may possibly mean that David is to the rulers of the earth an image of God. The reciprocal relation of Father and Son is not here conceived in its full inwardness and depth as Christianity knows it, for it has reference to office rather than to the person sustaining the office, but it is approximating thereto. There is an echo of the fundamental passage in ver. 26. (Compare 2 Sam. vii. 14.)

From ver. 28 onwards the psalmist turns to expand the promises to David's line. His words are mainly a poetical paraphrase of 2 Sam. vii. 14. Transgression shall indeed be visited with chastisement, which the fatherly relation requires, as the original passage indicates by the juxtaposition of the promise "I will be his Father," and the declaration "I will chasten him." But it will be chastisement only, and not rejection. The unchangeableness of God's loving purpose is very strongly and beautifully put in ver. 33, in which the twin attributes of Loving-kindness and Faithfulness are again blended as the ground of sinful men's hope. The word rendered above "break off" occasions a difficulty, both in regard to its form and its appropriateness in this connection. The clause is a quotation from 2 Sam. vii. 15, and the emendation which substitutes for *break off* the more natural word used there—namely, *withdraw*—is to be preferred. In ver. 33 *b* the paradoxical expression of *being false to My faithfulness* suggests the contradiction inherent in the very thought that He can break His plighted word. The same idea is again put in striking form in ver. 34: "I will not profane My

covenant," even though degenerate sons of David "profane" God's statute. His word, once spoken, is inviolable. He is bound by His oath. He has given His holiness as the pledge of His word, and, till that holiness wanes, those utterances which He has sealed with it cannot be recalled. The certainty that sin does not alter God's promise is not traced here to His placableness, but to His immutable nature, and to the obligations under which He is laid by His own word and acts. That unchangeableness is a rock-foundation, on which sinful men may build their certitude. It is much to know that they cannot sin away God's mercy nor exhaust His gentle long-suffering. It is even more to know that His holiness guarantees that they cannot sin away His promises, nor by any breach of His commandments provoke Him to break His covenant.

The allusions to the ancient promise are completed in vv. 36, 37, with the thought of the perpetual continuance of the Davidic line and kingdom, expressed by the familiar comparison of its duration to that of the sun and moon. Ver. 37 *b* is best understood as above. Some take the faithful witness to be the moon; others the rainbow, and render, as in the A.V. and R.V., "and as the faithful witness." But the designation of the moon as a witness is unexampled and almost unintelligible. It is better to take the clause as independent, and to suppose that Jehovah is His own witness, and that the psalmist here speaks in his own person, the quotation of the promises being ended. Cheyne encloses the clause in a parenthesis and compares Rev. iii. 14.

The third part begins with ver. 38, and consists of two portions, in the first of which the psalmist complains with extraordinary boldness of remonstrance,

and describes the contrast between these lofty promises and the sad reality (vv. 38–45), and, in the second, prays for the removal of the contradiction of God's promise by Israel's affliction, and bases this petition on the double ground of the shortness of life, and the dishonour done to His own Name thereby.

The expostulation very nearly crosses the boundary of reverent remonstrance, when it charges God with having Himself "abhorred" or, according to another rendering, "made void" His covenant, and cast the king's crown to the ground. The devastation of the kingdom is described, in vv. 40, 41, in language borrowed from Psalm lxxx. 12. The pronouns grammatically refer to the king, but the ideas of the land and the monarch are blended. The next pair of verses (42, 43) ventures still further in remonstrance, by charging God with taking the side of Israel's enemies and actively intervening to procure its defeat. The last verse-pair of this part (44, 45) speaks more exclusively of the king, or perhaps of the monarchy. The language, especially in ver. 45 *a*, seems most naturally understood of an individual. Delitzsch takes such to be its application, and supposes it to describe the king as having been prematurely aged by calamity; while Hupfeld, with Hengstenberg and others, prefer to regard the expression as lamenting that the early days of the monarchy's vigour had so soon been succeeded by decrepitude like that of age. That family, which had been promised perpetual duration and dominion, has lost its lustre, and is like a dying lamp. That throne has fallen to the ground, which God had promised should stand for ever. Senile weakness has stricken the monarchy, and disaster, which makes it an object of contempt, wraps it like a garment, instead of the

royal robe. A long, sad wail of the music fixes the picture on the mind of the hearer.

Then follows prayer, which shows how consistent with true reverence and humble dependence is the outspoken vigour of the preceding remonstrance. The boldest thoughts about the apparent contradiction of God's words and deeds are not too bold, if spoken straight to Him, and not muttered against Him, and if they lead the speaker to prayer for the removal of the anomaly. In ver. 46 there is a quotation from Psalm lxxix. 5. The question "How long" is the more imploring because life is so short. There is but a little while during which it is possible for God to manifest Himself as full of Loving-kindness and Faithfulness. The psalmist lets his feelings of longing to see for himself the manifestation of these attributes peep forth for a moment, in that pathetic sudden emergence of "I" instead of "we" or "men," in ver. 47*a*. His language is somewhat obscure, but the sense is clear. Literally, the words read "Remember—I, what a transitoriness." The meaning is plain enough, when it is observed that, as Perowne rightly says, "I" is placed first for the sake of emphasis. It is a tender thought that God may be moved to show forth His Loving-kindness by remembrance of the brief period within which a man's opportunity of beholding it is restricted, and by the consideration that so soon he will have to look on a grimmer sight, and "see death." The music again comes in with a melancholy cadence, emphasising the sadness which enwraps man's short life, if no gleams of God's loving-kindness fall on its fleeting days.

The last three verses (vv. 49–51) urge yet another plea—that of the dishonour accruing to God from the continuance of Israel's disasters. A second "Remember"

presents that plea, which is preceded by the wistful question "Where are Thy former loving-kindnesses?" The psalmist looks back on the glories of early days, and the retrospect is bitter and bewildering. That these were sworn to David in God's faithfulness staggers him, but he makes the fact a plea with God. Then in vv. 50, 51, he urges the insults and reproaches which enemies hurled against him and against "Thy servants," and therefore against God.

Ver. 50*b* is obscure. To "bear in the bosom" usually implies tender care, but here can only mean sympathetic participation. The psalmist again lets his own personality appear for a moment, while he identifies himself as a member of the nation with "Thy servants" and "Thine anointed." The last words of the clause are so obscure that there must apparently have been textual corruption. If the existing text is retained, the object of the verb *I bear* must be supplied from *a*, and this clause will run, "I bear in my bosom the reproach of all the many peoples." But the collocation of *all* and *many* is harsh, and the position of *many* is anomalous. An ingenious conjecture, adopted by Cheyne from Böttcher and Bickell, and accepted by Baethgen, reads for "all, many peoples," *the shame of the peoples*, which gives a good meaning, and may be received as at all events probable, and expressing the intent of the psalmist. Insolent conquerors and their armies triumph over the fallen Israel, and "reproach the footsteps" of the dethroned king or royal line—*i.e.*, they pursue him with their taunts, wherever he goes. These reproaches cut deep into the singer's heart; but they glance off from the earthly objects and strike the majesty of Heaven. God's people cannot be flouted without His honour being touched. Therefore

the prayer goes up, that the Lord would remember these jeers which mocked Him as well as His afflicted people, and would arise to action on behalf of His own Name. His Loving-kindness and Faithfulness, which the psalmist has magnified, and on which he rests his hopes, are darkened in the eyes of men and even of His own nation by the calamities, which give point to the rude gibes of the enemy. Therefore the closing petitions beseech God to think on these reproaches, and to bring into act once more His Loving-kindness, and to vindicate His Faithfulness, which He had sealed to David by His oath.

Ver. 52 is no part of the original psalm, but is the closing doxology of Book III.

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